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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

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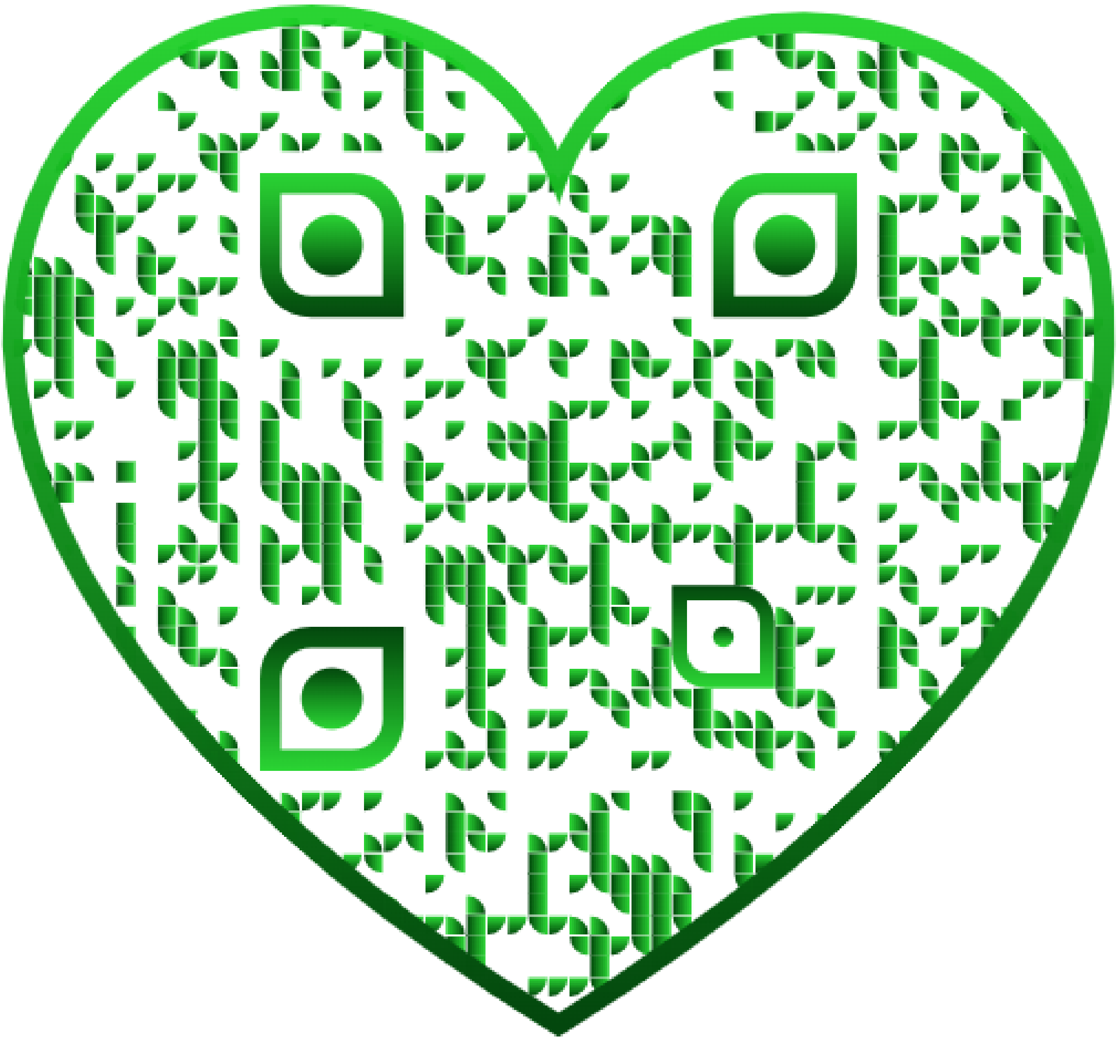

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Letter from the Editor

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Tony Quiroga

I was born after the American automobile dominated the world.

Whether it’s a Fox-body Mustang, a Cadillac Allanté, or anything in between, you’ll find it among the millions of cars listed on *C/D*’s new Marketplace at caranddriver.com/cars-for-sale/all.

EXCEPT FOR A FEW SUV-size blips, my life has coincided with the steadily declining market share of GM, Ford, and Chrysler (RIP, American Motors). I missed out on the ’60s muscle-car wars and high-compression, solid-lifter V-8s. Mid-’60s Pontiacs, arguably a high-water mark for the mainstream domestic car, are something I’ve only recently discovered. My life is marked by the industry’s hand-wringing struggle to adopt emissions controls, inability to assemble a reliable car, and product plans that were reactionary instead of visionary. It’s a life that’s seen downsizing, 165-hp Corvettes, pushrod four-cylinders, wire wheel covers, vinyl tops, and forests of fake wood.

ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN OLBRYSH

Like a rear-ended Ford Pinto, the American car industry incinerated the goodwill that existed for its brands. Customers left and never returned. My family’s experience mirrored that of countless others, going from a 100 percent GM household to dabbling with imports after being duped by a 1982 Olds Cutlass Ciera that died in intersections not long after leaving the dealer and a diesel Toronado that was guilty of being a diesel Toronado.

It hasn’t been all bad. In my high school years, Fox-body Mustang 5.0s were crude but revelatory. While that V-8’s party ended at about 4500 rpm, the 225 horsepower (which Ford later admitted was actually 205) was an inconceivable amount of power to a 16-year-old’s brain. A buddy borrowed his father’s Taurus SHO often enough that its front tires showed cords in less than a month. As a valet, I redlined Northstar Allantés and STSs. A rip in a GMC Syclone taught me the virtues of all-wheel drive in 5.3 seconds flat. Good times.

The best American cars have personality and flavor that linger after you park. Engineering for joy leads to compelling and successful models that connect with buyers. It’s the mainstream attempts that too often reek of uncompetitive mediocrity—the superb Chevy Trax [see page 62] is a rare exception. As a result, the Big Three are ceding boring segments to the imports. The death of the Malibu this year marks Chevrolet surrendering the sedan market and leaves the Corvette as Chevy’s only car. Except for the Mustang, Ford stopped building cars for the U.S. after 2022 and is killing the Meh-scape next year—the Escape-based Bronco Sport lives on because its off-road bent reads Raptor, not run-of-the-mill. Remember the Chrysler 200 and Sebring, or the Dodge Avenger and Dart? I’ll give myself partial credit. I had to look up the Avenger. Buyers who settle for boring vehicles don’t buy American. Realizing this, the domestic brands are shifting to cars with an “it” factor to make sales.

In this issue, we’re celebrating American cars in a section that starts on page 30. The three we’re featuring are among the most memorable and unique American cars ever, and not just because of their 401(k)-eviscerating prices. First up is the Ford Mustang GTD, an 815-hp racer intended to tattoo the Ford name on Porsche owners’ hippocampi. Is it better than a 911 GT3 RS? We compared them to find out. Next up is our drive of the Czinger 21C V Max, an American hypercar that shows us the future of design, engineering, and production. Finally, senior editor Ezra Dyer drives the Cadillac Celestiq, an 18-foot-long art project designed to undo 50 years of Cadillac floundering. While these cars won’t reverse the American auto industry’s fortunes, the attitude and thinking behind them are what could fuel its resurgence. And while that market share might be gone forever, at least we won’t be bored.

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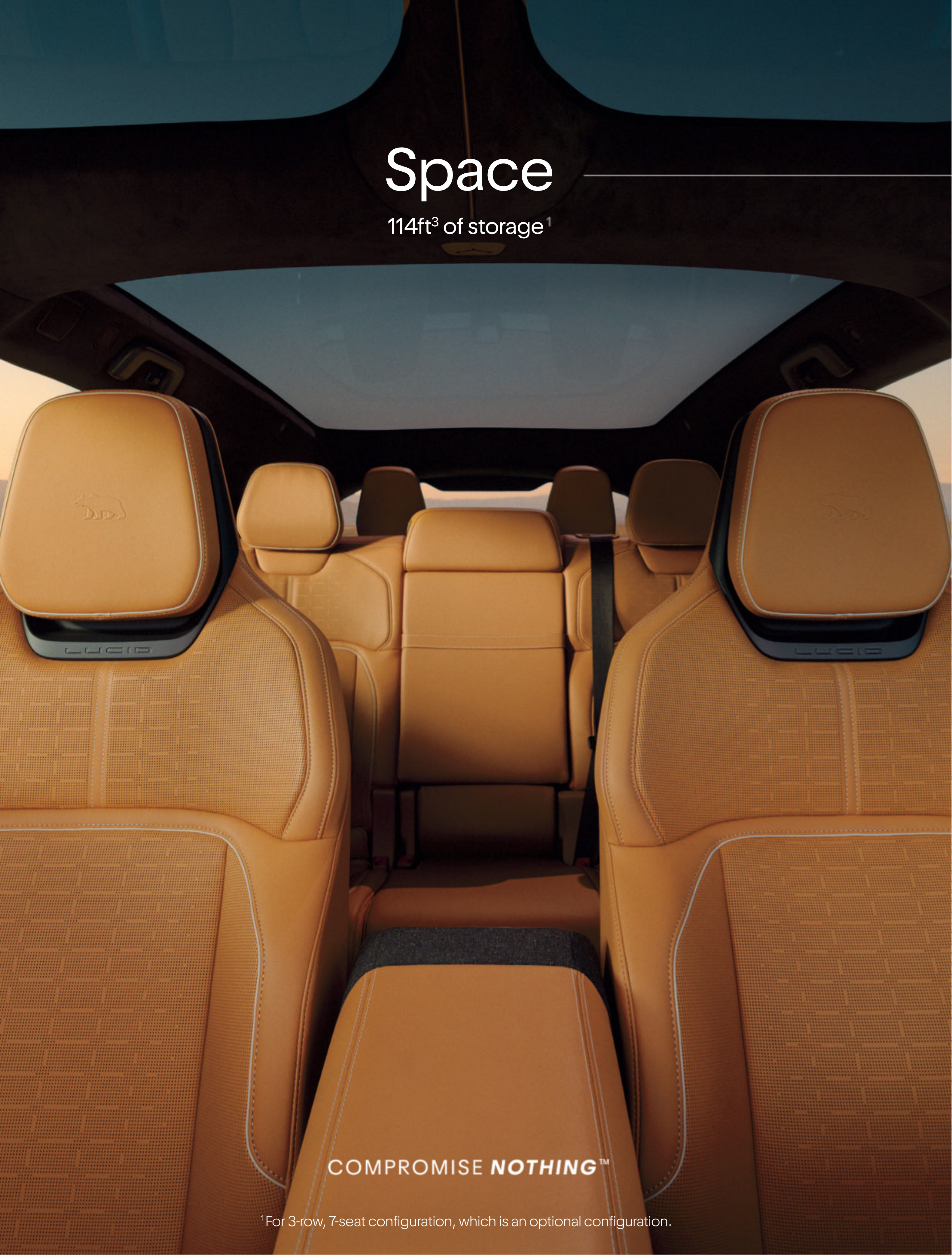

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BACKFIRES

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Think of it as the peer-review section of the magazine, hosted by your pal Ed.

CAR AND DRIVER
THE 1064-HP CHEVY CORVETTE ZR1 JUMP-STARTS OUR 70TH ANNIVERSARY

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Your crew always puts their collective heart and soul into your publication, but for this anniversary issue, they went above and beyond [July/August 2025]. I do believe I read every word, from cover to cover. I therefore declare this your best issue ever! (Er, since I cannot remember your 60th, 50th, 40th, 30th, or 20th anniversaries.) Congratulations and thank you!
—Bill Sawicki
Miami, FL

Congratulations on your 70th anniversary. Had I followed through with my threat to cancel my subscription back in 2013, you never would have made it. You're welcome.
—Martin Behm
Coeur d'Alene, ID
Couldn't imagine doing it without you, Behm—Ed.

This is the first time I have ever written to you or any other publication. I've been a subscriber for over five years, and I always look forward to reading each issue. The 70th anniversary issue was a tour de force, with brilliant writing, fascinating factoids, and, of course, your usual deep dives into car manufacturers' offerings. I will continue to subscribe to your fabulous magazine and eagerly await the next issue.
—Thomas Bak
Henderson, NV

Your 70th anniversary issue is the most chaotic and disjointed piece of copy I've ever seen. And you're still not forgiven for favorably comparing GM's X-car (the Chevy Citation) to a BMW.
—Eugene Ely
San Jose, CA
BMW comparison? More like Mandela effect—Ed.

Your 70th anniversary issue was incredible! It was full of wit, ingenuity, history, creativity, and, of course, silliness. Plus, you mentioned the Porsche 959 (I keep an eye out for references to it). Keep up the good work and do not cancel my subscription.
—Brad Mast
Hendersonville, NC

Congrats on making it to the big 7-0! I still have my well-preserved original copy of my favorite issue of all time (December 1991), which prominently featured my favorite sports car, the Shelby Cobra! Keep up the good work for the next 70, and maybe Ezra Dyer v2.1.3 will write a Cobra article in the December 2091 issue.
—Christopher Pericak
Charlottesville, VA

There is nowhere else that I can enjoy written gymnastics such as this in the ZR1 Corvette story: "slingshot dragsters with the life expectancy of a hand grenade—and a similar kill radius." And this gem when comparing EPA fuel economy between the Jeep Wrangler and the Pontiac GTO: "EPA Comb/City/Hwy 14/13/16 mpg [vs.] not/good mpg." Thanks for a great issue.
—Patrick Detches
Columbia, SC

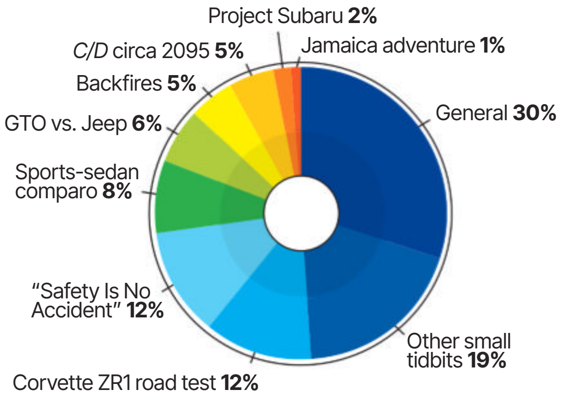
I've been a subscriber since 1974 at age 12 (thanks, Mom!), and *Car and Driver* has never been better. Truly impressive. Ezra Dyer v2.1.3 was gold. I can even forgive your proclamation that "GM blows everybody into the weeds" with the 1980 Chevy Citation per the May 1979 cover. *Car and Driver* has become every bit as awesome as the cars we now have.
—Gary Douglas
South Burlington, VT

LETTER OF THE ISSUE

Your trip down project-car memory lane in the 70th anniversary issue prompted me to dig up pictures from a trip I took about 40 years ago. I flew from Denver to Cleveland to spend a week visiting friends in a few Midwestern states, and a pilgrimage to *Car and Driver*'s HQ was included on my itinerary. Arriving at your former Hogback Road digs, my naïve younger self thought I could just drop by and meet a few editors, maybe even David E. Davis Jr. I believe it was the famous Mary Ann Pickney at the reception desk who politely informed me that everyone was busy, but she thanked me for coming by and gave me a *C/D* T-shirt. As I returned to my rented Thunderbird, happy to have finally set foot in the halls (well, the lobby) of *Car and Driver*, I noticed a yellow Mercedes wagon parked a few rows away. Its personalized plate confirmed that, while I may not have met any editors or *C/D*'s boss, I at least got to meet "the Boss's Wagen."
—Ray Cooke
El Segundo, CA
Sorry the late, great Mary Ann Pickney shut you out. To make up for not seeing the office that, according to Brock Yates, looked like some sort of carburetor-repair shop, you get a Pennzoil-branded PXG driver—Ed.

PENNZOIL
10.5

MMM, PIE



TIME IS A FLAT CIRCLE: In response to the July/August issue, our mail servers practically overloaded, mostly with general nostalgia for the past 70 years. Many of you liked the ZR1 test and the little factoids too.

The Chevrolet Corvette ZR1 article gets an A. The "Seems Like Old Times" comparison test and all the Backfires letters get an A as well. Every article beyond those is filler material, for a grade of F. This brings the whole 70th issue down to C–. This is a very enjoyable sports-car magazine. Unfortunately, huge mistakes do happen. I forgive you.
—Cleveland E. Norton Jr.
San Diego, CA
I'm giving this letter a pass—Ed.

Regarding your 70th anniversary issue, I must share the delight with which I read several little items therein. The bits about timing lights, float level gauges, and bumper jacks made me smile, as I still have those in my shop, unused for decades. But the article about project cars really brought back memories. I well remember the OHC Pontiac engine swap into an XK-E and the dual-engine Honda CRX, both brilliant concepts, and why not? I started reading *Car and Driver* around 1962, at age 12. You shifted my interest from hot rods and custom cars to more serious and more beautifully designed and elegantly engineered sports cars and performance sedans, where my interest has stayed to this day. I stopped saving the magazine copies long ago when it became time for a house addition to hold them all. I sincerely thank you for influencing my formative car years, the many years after, and the sarcastic element of my current personality. That may not show here, because my gratitude is sincere. If this doesn't get Letter of the Issue, please cancel my subscription.
—Dave Thomas
Edwardsville, IL

Hey, Ed., nice 70th anniversary issue. Pretty cool you pointed out the notable things in the automotive universe that turned 70 too. I flipped through it three times, though, and still must have missed your shout-out to the small-block Chevy V-8 of 1955, still truckin' after all these years.
—Kevin Goff
Atlanta, GA
Read page 24 again—Ed.

Your 70th anniversary issue was perfection, except for a shortage of John Phillips. I hope it doesn't end up being a requiem for your print version, but if so, you went out in a blaze of glory.
—Kurt Schlagel
Bloomington, MN

I realized the other day that I've bought or received as a subscription every issue of *Car and Driver* since I bought my first copy for 50 cents at Warwicks pharmacy in Mercerville, New Jersey. Every month, through college, law school, marriage(s), kids, grandkids, and retirement, I could count on the latest stuff from the gang at *C/D*, including the rantings of David E. Davis Jr., Brock Yates, Bruce McCall, Don Sherman, Jean Shepherd, P.J. O'Rourke, and Warren Weith. Keep up the good (if less frequently published) work!
—Mark Pope
San Diego, CA

GOATEES

As an owner of similar vehicles, I can offer my own opinion on "GOAT vs. Goat" [July/August 2025]. You didn't need to go with the 392 version of the Jeep. I own a Jeep Wrangler with the 3.6, which puts out a healthy 285 horsepower. I previously owned a 1971 GTO with the 400 engine and a gross horsepower rating of 300, probably 250 net. So 50 years of technology and a V-6 Jeep would probably beat a big V-8 muscle-car-era GTO.
—Bill Craft
Hollister, MO

"According to the transitive property, that makes the Wrangler better than plenty of now-multimillion-dollar classic Ferraris." Hahaha, you dorks.
—Benjamin T.
Preeceville, SK

In 1969, I purchased a '69 GTO Judge. Being young and car crazy, I wanted to see what my car would do to 60 mph. My buddy sat in the front seat and clicked a stopwatch when I floored it. Then clicked it again when I yelled "Stop!" How did you arrive at your zero-to-60 times back in the '60s? I'm 75 and still enjoy reading *C/D*.
—E. Miles Baldwin
Fort Worth, TX
It wasn't far off your technique until the fifth wheel arrived—Ed.

CAN I BORROW A PEN?

Thanks for the brief mention of Columbo's Peugeot. Just one more thing: I wanted a larger photo of the car and the man. I learned that pushing on the print-version photo won't work.
—Phil Martin
St. Paul, MN
Before you buy some readers, try this out for size—Ed.

GOLF CLUB: MICHAEL SIMARI; WAGON: RAY COOKE; PEUGEOT: ALAMY

BACKFIRES

Just finished reading the Jeep Wrangler/Pontiac GTO comparison. This answered a question that likely nobody but yourselves ever asked. I sure wouldn't have in my own 70 years on this earth. You compared an orange with an apple. The comparison is meaningless. A much better comparison would have been comparing a 1965 Ford Mustang to a 2025 Mustang. And with only six issues a year versus the former 12 issues, you would seem to have the time and opportunity to do better.
—*Mike Markovitch*
Monterey, CA
Feel free to do whatever comparison you want for your 70th anniversary—Ed.

CONTRIBUTOR

NICOLAS RAPP

Award-winning designer Nicolas Rapp has the uncanny talent of visualizing complex data sets with infographics while also crafting creative illustrations. Rapp has held positions with the Associated Press in New York and Paris. His time reporting from the ground during the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah inspired him to quit his job in 2009 and drive an 80-series Toyota Land Cruiser around the world because "life felt tame afterward." He covered 38,490 miles in 29 countries over 15 months. Now he drives a '21 Toyota Hilux pickup that he keeps in Mexico. His studio is in Livingston, Texas. See his work in this issue's Upfront section, starting on page 19.

FANTASTIC FOUR

I never thought I'd see a front-wheel-drive sedan cost almost $55,000, let alone win a comparison test against much more prestigious vehicles ["Seems Like Old Times," July/August 2025]. I think you just like playing with the stick.
—*Gary Keen*
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

I am wondering why you don't call out manufacturers for price gouging. For example, you recommend the Acura Integra as a great car, but it costs over $54,000! I bought an Acura Integra in 1987, when they first came out. It was an LS, around $13,000. In today's dollars, that would be about $37,700, not $54,000. I realize you are beholden to the manufacturers, but this price gouging will ruin the industry.
—*Jim Lucas*
Winter Park, FL
Your $37,700 Integra had 113 horsepower and hit 60 in 8.8 seconds. The $54K one has 320 horses and calls up 60 mph in 5.1 seconds. See the difference?—Ed.

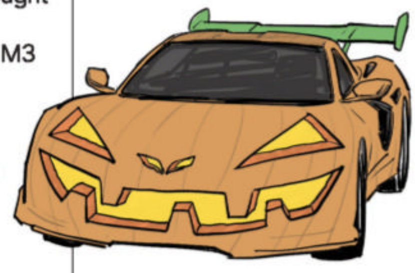
I own a 2022 Lexus IS500 Launch Edition, which I bought because BMW no longer makes a rear-wheel-drive M3 with a naturally aspirated V-8. To rank the IS500 in fourth place by one (subjective) point behind a trio of four-cylinder sedans shocked me. I'm at a loss for more words!
—*David Prepelka*
Moon Township, PA
Good. Now I won't have to respond to them—Ed.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN: The Lexus IS500 has taken part in its final comparison test. For 2026, the IS lineup contracts to just the IS350 model. The IS500 may have finished last in our comparo, but we encourage anybody who wants one to shop while supplies last.

The best car reviews let us readers daydream that we're riding with the author or even driving ourselves. Your new way of writing comparison tests falls short. The rigid structure (Car A's styling, Car B's styling, Car A's performance, Car B's performance, etc.) reads like an AI summary of the cars' specs. There's nothing for our imaginations to latch on to because there's no plot. Trust your writers to tell their story. Let them take us on an adventure.
—*Trevor Pontifex*
Pasadena, CA

THOUSAND ISLAND

The Corvette ZR1's jack-o'-lantern face is ghoulishly appropriate one day a year ["Hard Corvette," July/August 2025]. The other 364, I'd scream whenever I opened the garage.
—*Ralph Popelar*
San Juan Capistrano, CA



What's the story with the check-engine light on in the ZR1 on page 27? I thought only Volkswagen included those pre-illuminated as standard equipment from the factory. The engine shows idle rpm, so it's not an issue of the vehicle being "on" but not running. Inquiring minds want to know!
—*Justin C. Haase*
Mantorville, MN
It's likely the photographer caught it at startup and before the light extinguished itself—Ed.

I assume the "Drive Safely" license plate on the ZR1 visible in the photo on page 23 is an example of Ed.'s characteristic sarcasm. Also, could you clarify the location and color of the skid mark left when using ABS during the 233-mph stop?
—*Larry Badiner*
San Francisco, CA

K.C. Colwell wrote that when Adam Link tested the ABS calibration for the ZR1 from 233 mph, he "reported good stability and that it takes 1500 feet to stop, give or take a skid mark." I'm curious, was that skid mark on the pavement or in Link's tighty whities?
—*Mike Lossau*
Freeburg, IL

Just read the ZR1 test. Who did you have to sleep with to get a job like that?
—*Pedro Gregorio*
Fairfield, PA
Definitely not me—Ed.

ILLUSTRATION BY BRETT AFFRUNTI; SEDANS BY MICHAEL SIMARI; CONTRIBUTOR IMAGE COURTESY OF NICOLAS RAPP

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BACKFIRES

In your 70th anniversary issue, you state that "If it's not in a *C/D* road test, it's not important." Allow me to suggest your stats are missing an increasingly important piece of data: Does the vehicle have a spare tire? As vehicles get hybridized, the spare seems to frequently go bye-bye (e.g., Honda CR-V Hybrid), which is a significant deterrent for me and potentially many readers.
—Alan Study
Beverly Hills, MI

We'll be sure to, um, ah, study the need to bring back this data point—Ed.

On page 30, you say that the ZR1 beat the McLaren Senna's record at Virginia International Raceway (VIR) from 2019. On page 60, you said that the 2019 Senna is "currently sitting atop the throne" for its lap time at VIR. That appears to be a contradiction. Please clear it up for me.
—Brian Mulholland
Stoughton, WI

Earlier this year, a GM engineer drove a ZR1 to a VIR production-car record 2:32.3. We've yet to lap the ZR1 at VIR (it'll be at the next Lightning Lap), so the Senna's time remains the quickest Lightning Lap time—Ed.

ONE ISLAND

I very much enjoyed the article by Ezra Dyer and the photography by Roy Ritchie ["Steer It Up!," July/August 2025]. The track, the cars, the drivers and crew, the spectators. I never knew racing was big in Jamaica. It looked like a very cool atmosphere. I'm going to have to get some Red Stripe and Jamaican food. Would you consider doing an article on the Baja 1000? That would be great!
—Vic Januszewski
Cedar Springs, MI

CRASH INTO ME

I really enjoyed reading "Safety Is No Accident" [July/August 2025] since you included actual statistics. But did the studies also include the damage caused by those systems that may not have happened if they weren't present? Twice in two years, my car has mistakenly braked hard when I knew I was clear of the turning car in front of me, and I wondered whether I was about to be rear-ended. Don't get me wrong. I'm still a big fan, especially as the systems continue to improve. But I'm sure I'm not the only one who wants to know.
—Mark Secunda
Silver Spring, MD

Ever have one slam on the brakes when you're backing into an empty parking spot?—Ed.

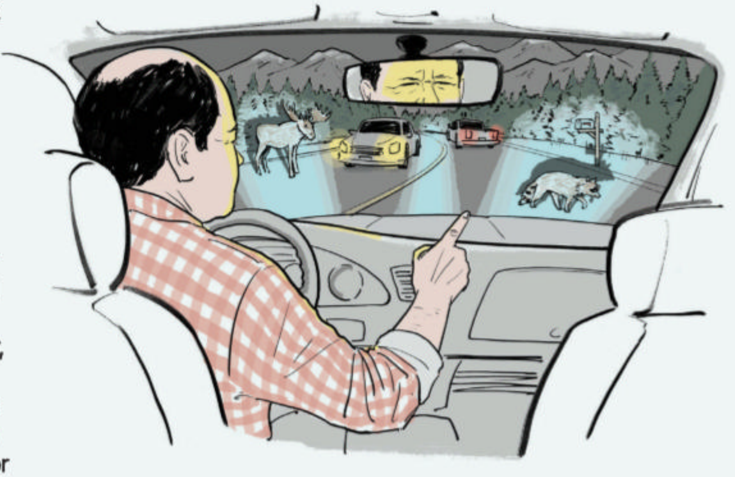
You can take FCW, AEB, PAEB, BSM, LDW, LKA, LCA, RAEB, AHB, ADS, and anything else they can think of and put them where the sun don't shine! Thank God my 10-year-old Honda with only 110,000 on the clock still runs great!
—Glen R. Fotre
Tucson, AZ

Csaba Csere's second-to-last line states, "Nobody seems to know what." Well, I know. But I'm not telling unless you make this the Letter of the Issue and send me a nice gift.
—Rob Gardiner
Madoc, ON

How about a bad gift?—Ed.

Whether or not Csere is being coyly sarcastic when he says that "nobody seems to know what" is responsible for the unacceptably high automobile-related fatality rate in the United States is beside the point. Anyone with common sense or the ability to do a Google search will know that death rates are highly correlated with vehicle weight and horsepower, which have also gone up significantly of late. Is *Car and Driver* in any way responsible for this trend by glorifying inane measures of performance or by tacitly

THE EDITORS EXPLAIN



Csaba Csere's do-they-work article ["Safety Is No Accident"] is timely, but I was sorry it didn't include statistics for LED matrix headlights. I think my Audi Q4 has them, but my dealership doesn't understand them, the manual doesn't exactly explain them either, and the ones I have don't work quite like the internet promises. North American regulators blocked them for years, but any number of makes now offer them, and LED matrix headlights should improve road safety for everybody.
—Claude Maurice
Victoria, BC

You're spot on that the technology, which selectively adjusts the illumination of areas occupied by oncoming traffic or pedestrians, was blocked by regulations for a number of years before Canada approved adaptive, or matrix, high-beams in 2018 and NHTSA ostensibly green-lit them in February 2022. Alas, some automakers, including Audi, won't activate the systems' full potential in the U.S. because their existing designs don't comply with the 2022 regulation. We've sampled the tech and found it very helpful because light pollution, both inside and outside the car, hinders our own night vision. If anything, with matrix LEDs we've been able to distinguish between raccoons and mailboxes with far greater accuracy than a squinting George Costanza. —K.C. Colwell

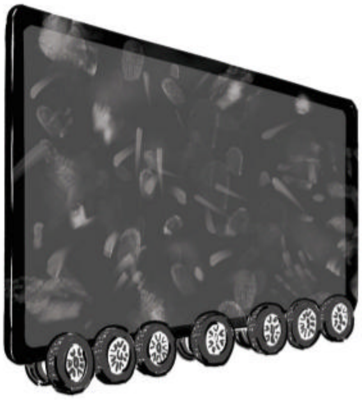
ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRETT AFFRUNTI

promoting all-around on-road hooliganism? Nobody seems to know.
—Douglas Philbrick
Pacific Grove, CA
Correlation is not the same as causation—Ed.

The article on crashes and fatalities says the fatality rate has gone up since 2014. So has the number of pickup trucks. Makes me wonder if that's why.
—Ron Williamson
Bloomington, MN
Correlation is not the same as causation, part two—Ed.

THE CRYSTAL BALL

Your article about cars of 2095 was hysterical [July/August 2025]. I haven't laughed that hard reading something since Dave Barry's annual "Year in Review." The terminologies and descriptions were imaginative and funny. Keep the humor coming.
—Lawrence Kreisberg
Cooper City, FL



"The 2087 Smudgemaster Glitch 5000—a 17-foot screen with wheels." Funniest. Mental. Picture. Ever. Rendering, please.
—David Black
Naples, FL

It certainly was a joy to time-travel with Ezra Dyer's imagined view of the state of the "auto" industry in 2095 for the 140th anniversary of *C/D*. When I read the last line, "Fully autonomous cars are just a few years away," I had to chuckle. And it hit me—my man started with that final line and worked backward putting this piece together.
—G. Armstrong
Midlothian, VA

Dyer failed to note that following Saab's adoption of trollennium to support its tokamak power systems, the project was quickly abandoned, and the company turned its attention to using unobtainium to reduce weight. The Trollhättan Asp, introduced next, weighed in at only 118 kilograms before fueling. Unfortunately, that advance had to be abandoned when owners started to complain of radiation effects. Since then, the company's cars have been largely made of cast iron.
—Terry Pearson
Wolfville Ridge, NS

EXTRA, EXTRA

Is it just me, or are the contributors always better than the regular editors?
—Will Beckman
Holland, MI
Definitely you—Ed.

I have been reading *Car and Driver* since the late 1960s. However, the last time I sent you a letter was in the late 1970s. Do I win a prize for exercising the most self-restraint?
—Larry Butler
Tulare, CA
Nope—Ed.

I've only written in via email. Is there a physical address I can use? Just figured it would be more fun if we were pen pals.
—Dominic
McKinney, TX
I can't imagine having more fun than we're having right now—Ed. ■

CAR AND DRIVER

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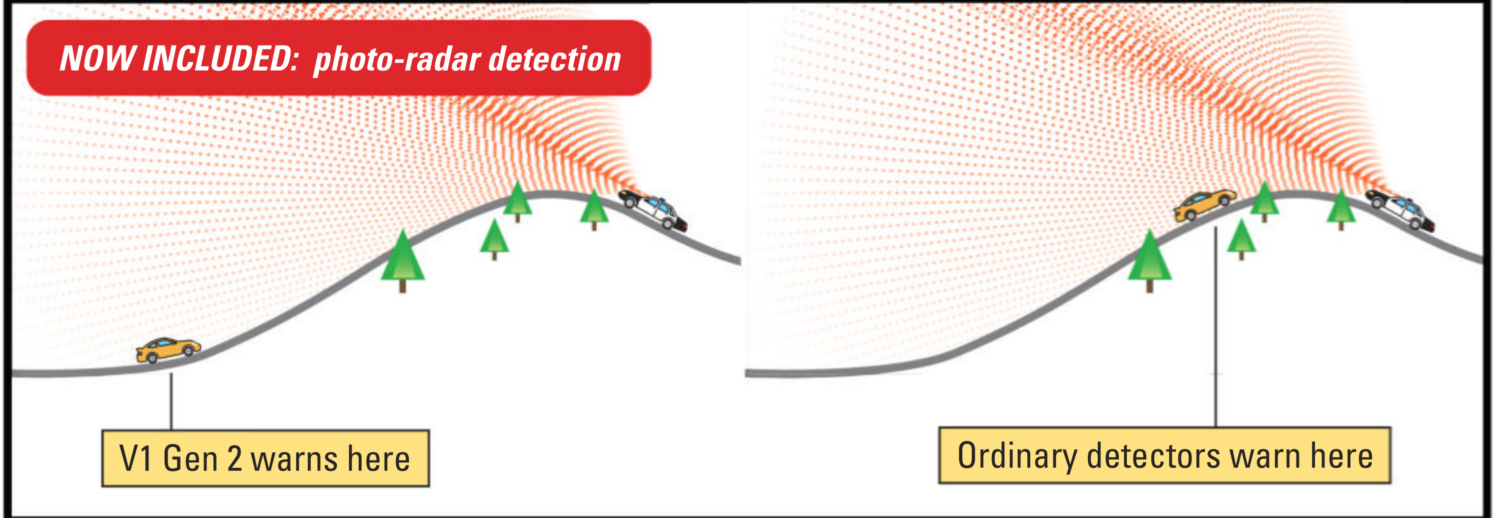
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STILL MADE IN CINCINNATI

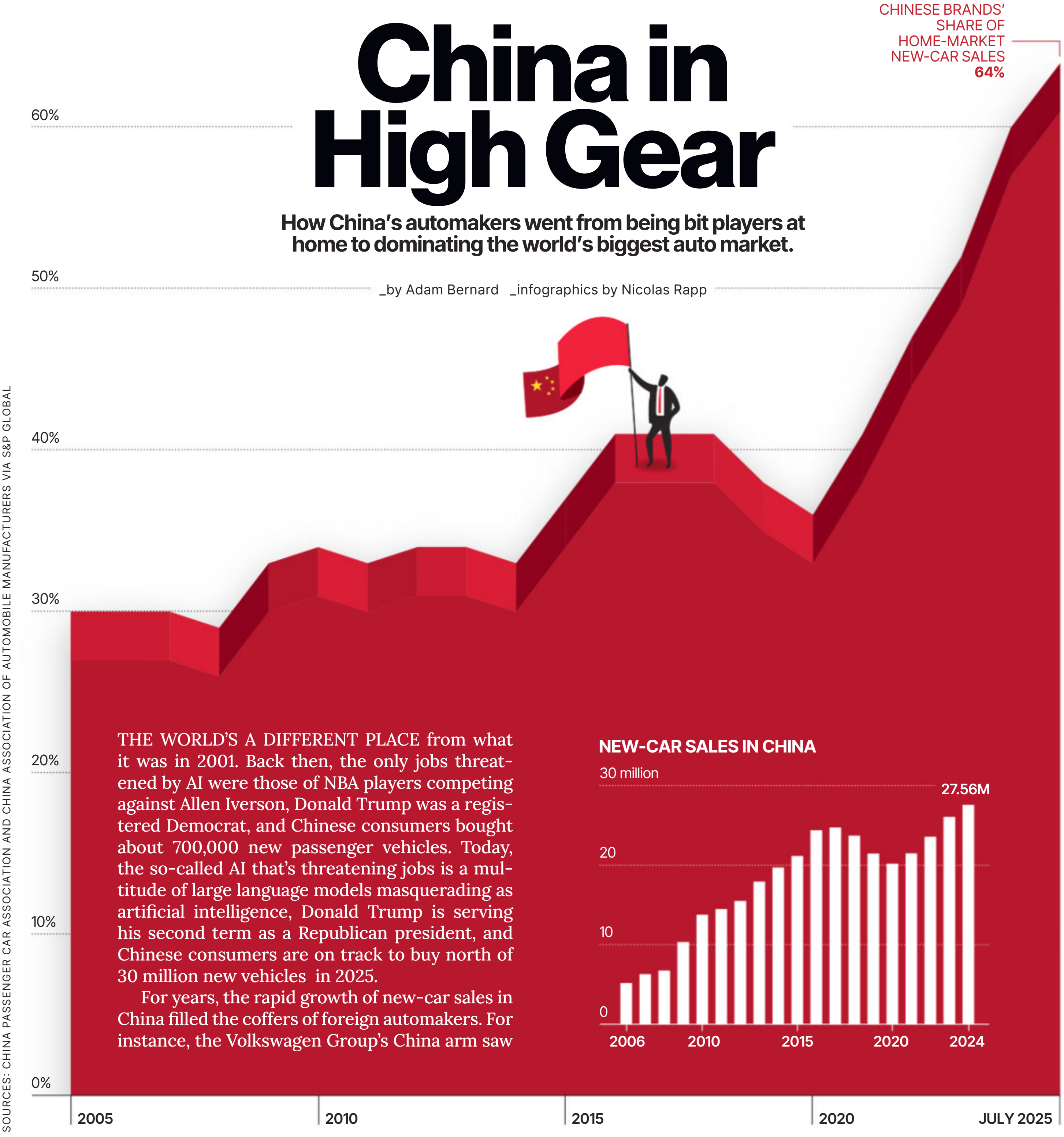
UPFRONT

_BEASTS ON A PLANE _CLAM UP _CLUTCH IS LIFE

China in High Gear

How China's automakers went from being bit players at home to dominating the world's biggest auto market.

_by Adam Bernard _infographics by Nicolas Rapp



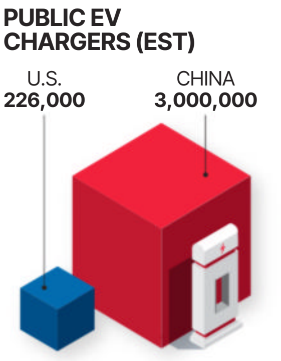
THE WORLD'S A DIFFERENT PLACE from what it was in 2001. Back then, the only jobs threatened by AI were those of NBA players competing against Allen Iverson, Donald Trump was a registered Democrat, and Chinese consumers bought about 700,000 new passenger vehicles. Today, the so-called AI that's threatening jobs is a multitude of large language models masquerading as artificial intelligence, Donald Trump is serving his second term as a Republican president, and Chinese consumers are on track to buy north of 30 million new vehicles in 2025.

For years, the rapid growth of new-car sales in China filled the coffers of foreign automakers. For instance, the Volkswagen Group's China arm saw

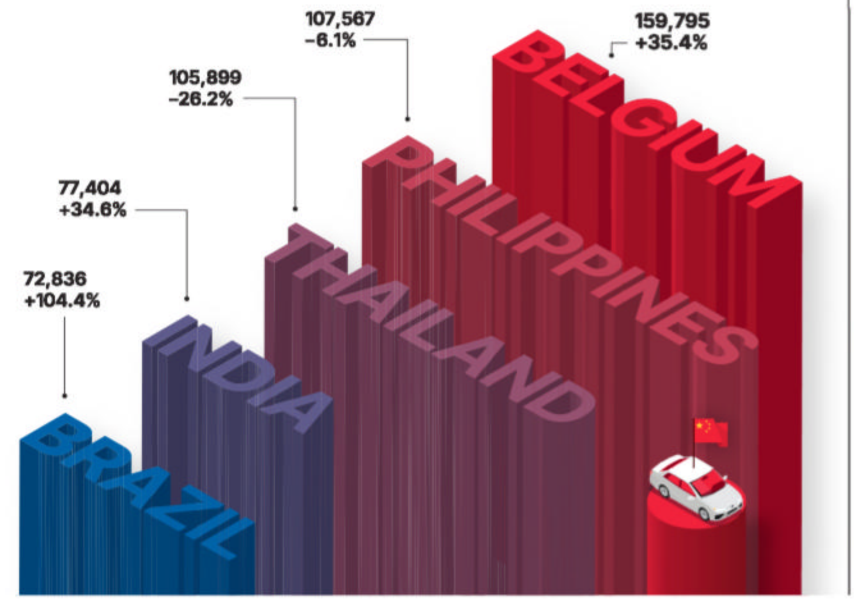
SOURCES: CHINA PASSENGER CAR ASSOCIATION AND CHINA ASSOCIATION OF AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURERS VIA S&P GLOBAL its operating profits balloon from roughly $143 million in 2006 to almost $3.4 billion in 2011. That year, foreign automakers accounted for 67 percent of the new-car market in China. Through the 2010s, domestic brands made some inroads, but even in 2019, foreign companies still held 62 percent of the market. The tides turned fast, however, and within a few years, Chinese automakers took the lion's share. Now two out of three new cars sold in China are from domestic brands.

How did non-Chinese automakers cede so much share of the world's largest market? "Automakers lost ground because China treated autos and batteries as strategically vital industries," says Usha Haley, PhD, a professor whose research lies in technology development and the Chinese auto industry.

Arguably, it was a 1979 Chinese law on equity and joint ventures that led this charge. The law opened the country's new-car market to external investors. But it required foreign automakers to enter joint ventures with local producers, and China later limited foreign investment to no more than 50 percent of each collaboration. Where legacy automakers saw an opportunity for short-term financial gain, China saw long-term benefits for its own automotive industry, as technology transfer from the West would ultimately fall into the hands of the country's domestic automakers.


PUBLIC EV CHARGERS (EST)

TOP 5 MARKETS FOR CHINESE EVs, 2024
Number of vehicles imported and percentage change from 2023.



The fruits of this protectionist policy bore China more than just simple technological know-how in assembling a vehicle; it also netted the country's auto industry insights into electric-vehicle technologies. In 2009, China began incentivizing domestic production of battery-electric, fuel-cell electric, and plug-in hybrid vehicles as part of a plan to lessen dependence on foreign oil. Though manufacturers such as General Motors and Nissan initially protested the transfer of their plug-in hybrid and EV technology into China, they eventually caved in the name of profits, transferring some related tech to their Chinese partners to take advantage of the government stimulus and keep their balance sheets in the black.

The result? "Domestic firms quickly absorbed this know-how and, with massive state subsidies, leapfrogged into EV leadership," Haley says. "BYD, for instance, runs factories at 80 to 85 percent utilization"—a number that optimizes per-unit costs—"and integrates its own batteries and chips, allowing it to slash prices by over 30 percent while still expanding."

For its part, China eliminated the joint-venture requirement for foreign manufacturers of pas-

FACTORY AND CHARGING PHOTOS: COSTFOTO/NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

With government support and vertically integrated supply chains, Chinese automakers such as BYD are able to undercut foreign brands' prices, as well as quickly adopt new technologies.

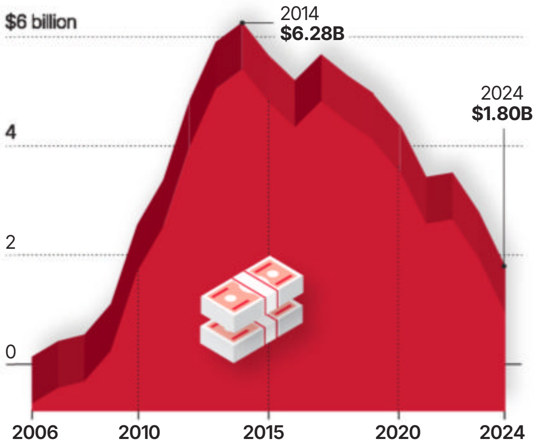
senger vehicles. Despite this, the government still does plenty to tip the scales in its own favor. Claire Yuan, an S&P Global Ratings director, credits the Chinese government's policies that support domestic automakers, as well as the rapid build-out of local supply chains and an expansive charging infrastructure, for fueling the growth of home-market brands.

Bill Russo, founder and CEO of the strategy and investment platform Automobility Limited, puts it this way: "In China, policy, capital, and companies move in lockstep." As a result, China's domestic automakers are especially agile, capable of integrating new technologies into their vehicles more quickly and under shorter development cycles than their foreign counterparts, which are often hindered by some combination of external and internal politics.

With high U.S. tariffs on products from China, particularly EVs, as well as a ban on the sale of connected-vehicle hardware and software from the country, the odds of a People's Republic brand making headway in the U.S. auto market are slim. Elsewhere, though, Chinese automakers continue to gain ground. In the European Union and the U.K., they accounted for 5.1 percent of new-vehicle registrations through the first half of 2025, nearly double that of a year earlier, despite EU tariffs ranging from 17 to 35 percent.

At this rate, Chinese manufacturers could take the majority of Europe's new-car market within five years. It seems unlikely, but if it does materialize, then it shows that forward-looking government policies, combined with access to the technologies and capabilities of legacy marques, provided China's automakers with the tools they needed to leap forward.

VW GROUP CHINA'S OPERATING PROFITS



VW Group China's operating profits (what it took home to Germany, essentially) peaked in 2014. That year, VW Group China sold 3.68 million vehicles—more than eight times BYD's estimated sales. A decade later, BYD sold 3.84 million vehicles in China, surpassing VW Group China's sales by more than 900,000 units.

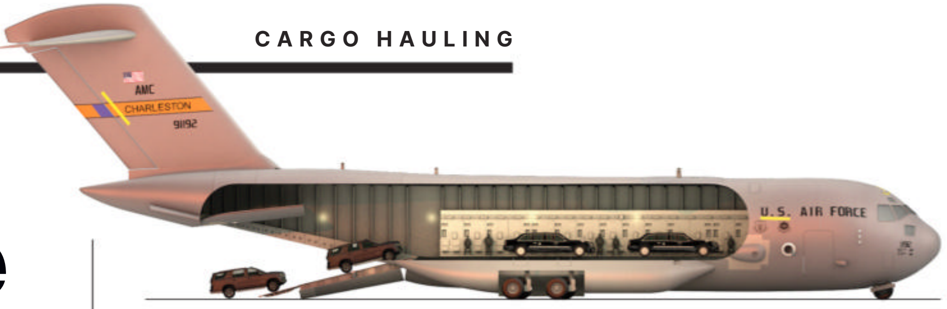
SHOW PHOTO: YIN DONGXUN/XINHUA/GETTY IMAGES; FACTORY PHOTO: FANG DONGXU/VCG/GETTY IMAGES

Executive Shuffle

Wherever the president travels, the world's most secure vehicle goes too.

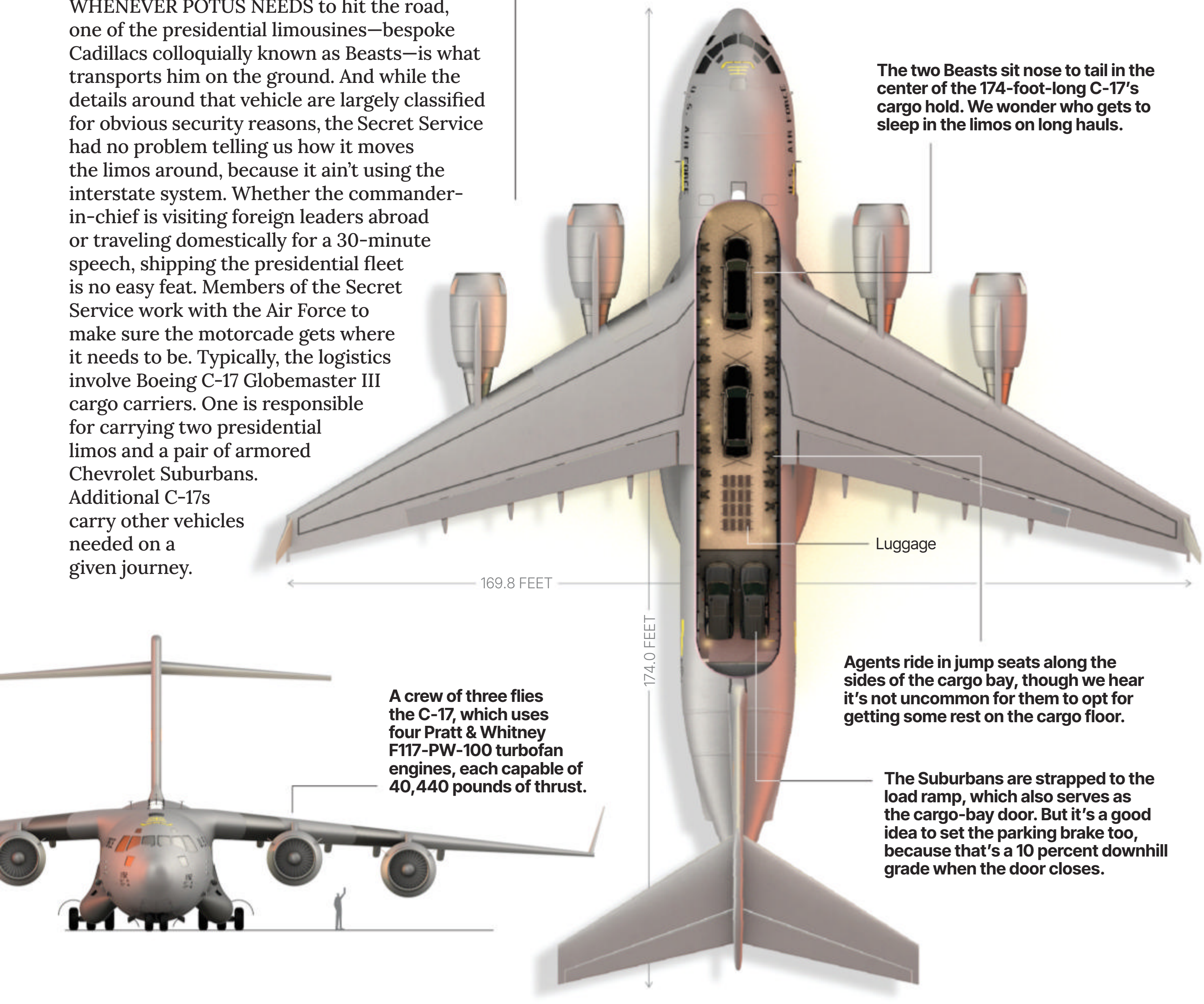
_by Jack Fitzgerald

WHENEVER POTUS NEEDS to hit the road, one of the presidential limousines—bespoke Cadillacs colloquially known as Beasts—is what transports him on the ground. And while the details around that vehicle are largely classified for obvious security reasons, the Secret Service had no problem telling us how it moves the limos around, because it ain't using the interstate system. Whether the commander-in-chief is visiting foreign leaders abroad or traveling domestically for a 30-minute speech, shipping the presidential fleet is no easy feat. Members of the Secret Service work with the Air Force to make sure the motorcade gets where it needs to be. Typically, the logistics involve Boeing C-17 Globemaster III cargo carriers. One is responsible for carrying two presidential limos and a pair of armored Chevrolet Suburbans. Additional C-17s carry other vehicles needed on a given journey.



Though the government does not disclose a curb weight for the presidential limos or the motorcade's armored Suburbans, the total tonnage of the vehicles, along with the luggage and other equipment onboard, surely falls well below the C-17's 170,900-pound payload capacity. Right?"

Roughly 40 agents ride on the C-17, with their luggage strapped to the floor.



The two Beasts sit nose to tail in the center of the 174-foot-long C-17's cargo hold. We wonder who gets to sleep in the limos on long hauls.

Luggage

Agents ride in jump seats along the sides of the cargo bay, though we hear it's not uncommon for them to opt for getting some rest on the cargo floor.

A crew of three flies the C-17, which uses four Pratt & Whitney F117-PW-100 turbofan engines, each capable of 40,440 pounds of thrust.

The Suburbans are strapped to the load ramp, which also serves as the cargo-bay door. But it's a good idea to set the parking brake too, because that's a 10 percent downhill grade when the door closes.

ILLUSTRATION BY NICOLAS RAPP

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Frank Duran with his mother, Frances, and the family's '65 Buick Riviera. The motorized-actuator assembly kit (below) sells for about $600.

Headlights on the Half Shell

As a feature for one model year only, the 1965 Buick Riviera's clamshell headlights are a rarity. So are the parts needed to keep them working.

_by Brett Berk

FOR SOME TIME, finding a 1965 Buick Riviera with functioning headlights was a marvel akin to finding a pearl in a clam. Whereas Buick equipped '63 and '64 Rivieras with exposed headlights, it eschewed the grille-mounted horizontally arranged sealed beams for the first-gen Riv's final model year.

Instead, Buick fit its big two-door with a set of stacked lamps at the leading edge of the front fenders. Each pair hid behind clamshell covers that split open and retracted into the bodywork. But the power-actuated covers proved prone to failure. With the clamshells' operating mechanism sitting behind the bumper, "the weather would get to it, and the internal relays would get gunked up, rusty, and then your motor wouldn't work," says Frank Duran of the Frank Your Mechanic auto-repair shop in Fresno, California.

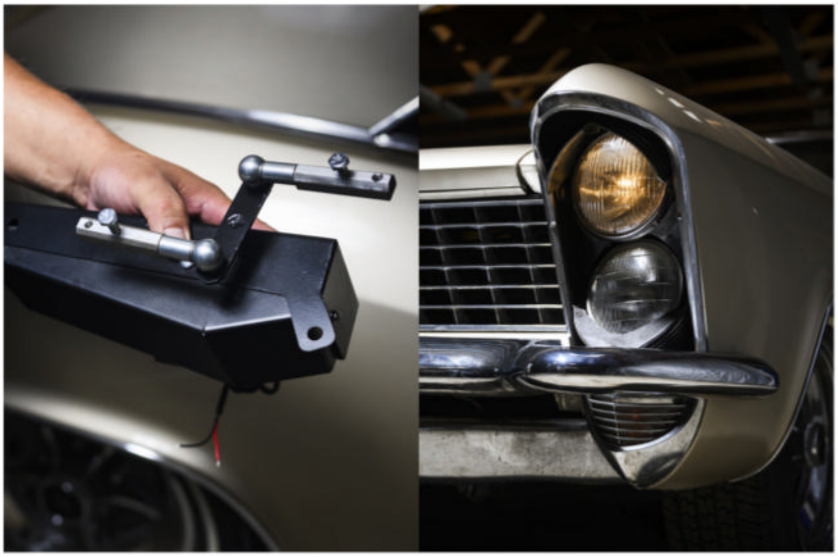
His father, Paul, owned several '65 Rivieras over the years and was well versed in their wonky eyelids. "He'd always had a little trouble with the headlights," Frank says. "So he would rebuild them, and they'd work a dozen times or so" before quitting on him.

Around 2005, Paul created a prototype motorized-actuator assembly that fit the factory position and brackets of Buick's now-60-year-old luxury coupe. He then hired a metalworker to fabricate a heavy-gauge casing. But Paul wasn't great with wiring, "so he just put in a rocker toggle switch under the dash, and when he went to turn the lights on, then he'd hit the rocker, and those things would open up and stay opened up," Frank says of the clamshells.

After Paul sold several of these devices, one of his customers sent him a diagram that showed how to wire in two relays. With this newfound knowledge, Paul had a way to connect his actuator to the Buick's original wiring harness, thus allowing the headlight covers to open and close without the need for an auxiliary toggle switch.

Since Paul's death in 2020, Frank has taken over the responsibility of helping keep the clamshell headlight covers of '65 Rivieras functional. He continues to make the mechanism that Paul perfected, receiving a couple of orders each month from customers willing to shell out 600 clams for the kit.

By this point, however, Frank and his late father have likely shucked most of the market for this product. As Frank says of the '65 and its classic clamshells, "I don't know how many Rivieras are left that don't have a working motor."



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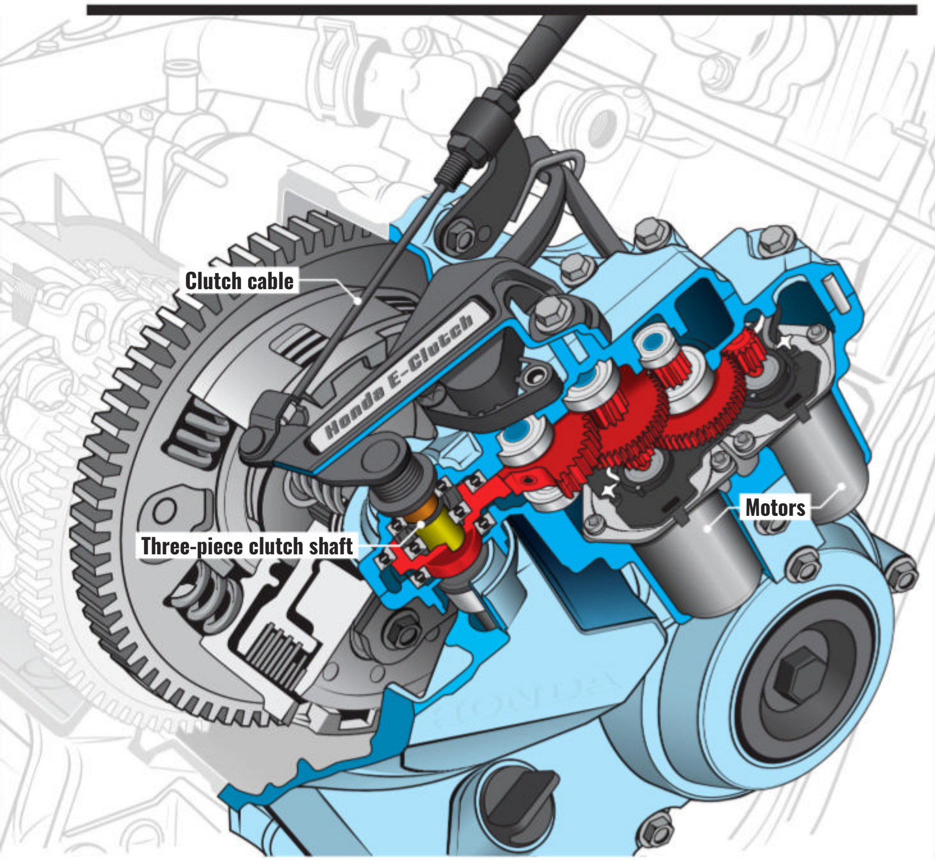

Coming In Clutch

Honda's E-Clutch automates the clutch without sacrificing manual control.

_by Greg Fink

DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS, our crusade to "Save the manuals!" has failed to keep the stick shift off the endangered-species list. When our campaign started in 2010, there were still more than 100 models offering a three-pedal-equipped configuration. In 2025, that number has fallen to just 27. Perhaps one reason people grew weary of the manual transmission is the fatigue experienced by the leg that operates the clutch.

While the notion of a manual gearbox that forgoes a clutch pedal is nothing new (Chrysler brought such a concept to market in the 1940s), the theoretical promise of the idea has never panned out in practice. It's fair to blame the poor clutch modulation of the prior iterations.

One vehicle manufacturer has a solution to this conundrum—at least for its motorcycles. Honda's E-Clutch relies on a pair of electric motors for clutch control, as well as the aid of an angle sensor and a controller area network to allow communication between the control units of the motors and engine. When active, the E-Clutch relieves riders of the $9999 CB650R and $10,499 CBR650R bikes of all clutch-related duties. But the ace up the E-Clutch's sleeve is that it retains a working clutch lever, giving riders of these 94-hp four-cylinder bikes the option to manipulate the clutch with the old-fashioned handlebar lever and cable.

Despite its increased complexity, the E-Clutch adds just a claimed 4.5 pounds of weight and around two inches of width to the six-speed transmission. From the saddle, this extra breadth goes unnoticed. As does the system's operation, which quickly disengages and reengages the clutch between shifts and smoothly applies the clutch when pulling away from stops. About the only operational complaint we had was a lack of precise speed control when creeping at a snail's pace on uphill inclines. But even this is only a mild annoyance since grabbing the clutch lever shuts off the E-Clutch system, thus giving the rider absolute clutch authority.

Alas, the E-Clutch isn't likely to be the holy-grail tech that saves the manuals in cars and trucks. The setup is optimized by motorcycle elements not found in automobiles. These include the quick-engaging dog gears in motorcycles' sequential transmissions and a cable-operated clutch for working the trick three-piece lever shaft that allows riders to manually override the automated system. Could a similar technology for use with the hydraulic clutch and slower-to-engage synchromesh-supplemented gears of a road car be developed? Maybe. But it's doubtful an automaker would make the investment for an increasingly small piece of the market.

To keep the E-Clutch narrow and out of the way, Honda used two small inline electric motors instead of a single big one. The three-piece clutch-decoupling shaft allows the rider to take over operation if desired.

ILLUSTRATION BY PETE SUCHESKI

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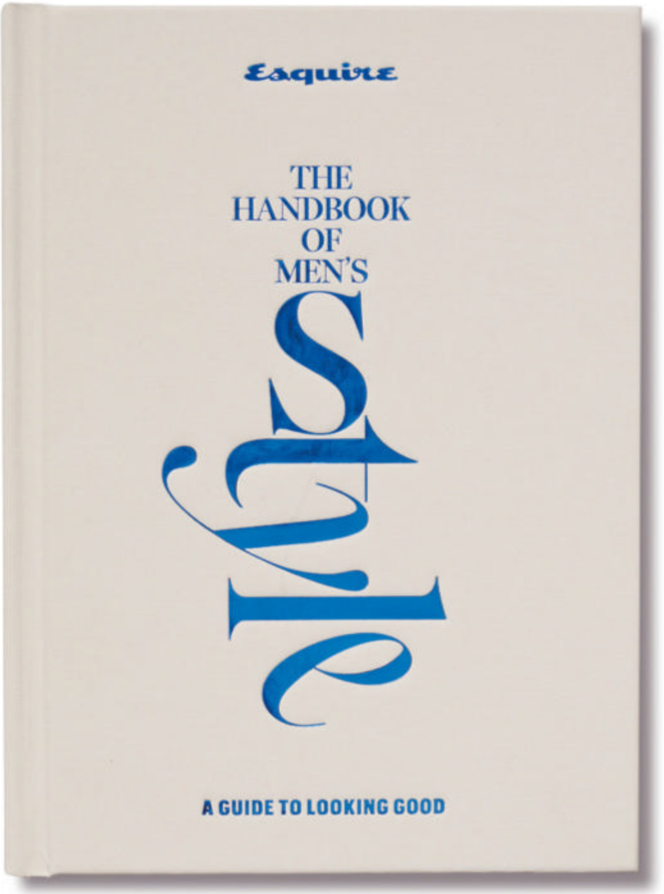
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If you find yourself having to sell a car, skip the classifieds drama. The best buyer is one who's in your contacts list.

SELLING A CAR is a terrible experience. If buying a car is your first day at Walt Disney World, selling one is the long drive home. List a car for sale and you'll soon see why people amass car collections. Jay Leno probably only likes about five of his cars; he just doesn't want to spend the rest of his life answering questions about the service history of Doble E-20 piston valves.

Likely the least aggravating way to sell a car is through a vehicle auction site, and even that presents challenges. If your car is special enough to be accepted by a premium auction site like Bring a Trailer, you must prepare for unimaginable pedantry from the bidders: "Please provide the exact build date for this car because I'm concerned that the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in 2010 might have caused particulate contamination of the clear-coat. Also, there's a technical service bulletin on the passenger's-side rear headrest, so I'll need to see if that's been addressed and all bolts torqued to spec before I enter my bid of $6969."

Most of us with less-than-perfect cars use Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace, both of which are great ways to hear from people who'd like to pay a third of what you're asking. Meta, corporate overlord of Marketplace, is worth almost $2 trillion and yet still tees up listing interactions with the infuriatingly nonsensical "Hi, is this available?" When I list a car, it's available to everyone except the people who ask if it's available.

When I was selling my E36 BMW M3, I was besieged by used-car dealers trying to rope me into consignment deals. I've traded in cars at dealerships for give-it-away money just because of the convenience. I once took a personal check proffered in a McDonald's parking lot, so ready was I to be done with that particular selling experience (the check cleared).

But there is a better way. You might accept somewhat less money, but you'll escape with your soul intact. If you've got a car to sell, talk to friends and family first.

That's what I did with my 1990 Mercedes 300SE, which went to my mom. She put a working engine in it but mostly just liked to see it in her garage, as did I when I went over to visit. She was the perfect owner for an imperfect S-class, regarding the Benz less as transportation than as a permanent Bruno Sacco art installation.

Likewise, when the time came to sell my diesel Bronco, my friend Dave flew from Massachusetts to North Carolina to collect it. Because I was selling it to him and not a rapacious stranger, I actually bothered fixing some things that were wrong with it before the deal went down—like the rear-window motor, which hadn't worked for years, and a transmission leak. I should have addressed those problems for my own sake long before that, but preparing a car to sell to a friend is like cleaning your house before company comes over. You're temporarily pretending to have your act together.

The Bronco made it back to Massachusetts, and the next time I went to visit, I got to drive it again. It was strange, driving my car that wasn't mine anymore, but I was happy to see it and happy that Dave is enjoying it. He put in a new transmission, so you no longer have to count one-Mississippi on the shift between first and second gear, and I hear he's recently replaced the grimy plastic F-350 steering wheel with something nicer. I'm like a Bronco empty nester, getting life updates from afar, except that the Bronco won't call to ask for money.

That role now falls to the new child, a 2000 Land Rover Discovery Series II. How did I end up with that? A family friend, Keefer, called me one day and said, "My rotator cuffs are shot, and I can't really drive the Rover anymore. You want to buy it?" When I showed up to look at it the next day, he said, "I was up all night last night, thinking about all the fun adventures I've had with this." He bought the Land Rover new in 2000 and put 149,000 miles on it, but he didn't want it languishing in his garage, so now I'm the steward of another charismatic old four-by-four that's prone to besmirching driveways. Keefer did a lot of maintenance on the Discovery but pointed out that this vehicle came with a dealer-provided drip pan when he bought it.

I think the Discovery is awesome. In fact, it's so awesome that I'm not driving my Daihatsu Rocky as much as I should. I'm not sure what to do about that, but friends will be the first to know when I answer the eternal question of car ownership: Is this available?

ELANA SCHERR

Taking a gamble on a 23-year-old luxury car to escape the heat came with a cool bonus history lesson.

I NEEDED A CAR with air conditioning. A sensible person would have bought the 208,000-mile Lexus LS430 for $3000 as a summer beater, or maybe the flawless one-owner 2007 Mercury Grand Marquis for $7700. A reckless person might have gone for one of several SRT Mopars or manual Cadillac CTS-Vs in the range of $15,000 to $20,000, despite their astronomical and no doubt tire-smoking miles and multiple accident reports. As I am neither sensible nor reckless but some other, different type of person (a friend described me as "a handmaiden of chaos"), I couldn't stomach any of the reasonable choices and had to admit that being the 15th owner of a twice-wrecked and possibly stolen Charger Hellcat was unlikely to be any less stressful than sweating in my '81 Trans Am.

In the end, I made the only choice possible and bought a Black Sapphire Metallic blue 2002 Bentley Arnage T with 41K miles for $23,000. That's about a tenth of its original purchase price and, crucially, less than I had just made selling a 1970 Nova. Legally, the majority of the money made by selling a car must be put back into buying another car. For, um, tax reasons. My favorite part about impulse-buying the Bentley is that I knew nothing about this era of luxury cars going in, and the only thing I love more than ice-cold air is an interesting rabbit hole. What started as an attempt just to figure out what engine I had and what company I should look to for spare parts ended up turning into a full-on research project.

The 2002 Arnage T came to market at the crux of a rather delicious bit of industry warfare. At the time of the Arnage's development, Bentley shared both headquarters and sheetmetal with Rolls-Royce, a quiet marriage that started in the 1930s and had, since the '80s, been overseen by the manufacturing group Vickers PLC. By 1998, when the first series Arnage debuted, Vickers was in the process of selling Rolls and Bentley, with BMW and Volkswagen both placing bids.

BMW seemed like the front-runner, as it was already partnered with both luxury brands to provide engines for the Arnage and its RR sibling, the Silver Seraph. The bidding grew fierce, and VW plopped down over $700 million to walk away the victor, or so it thought. As it turned out, Vickers didn't own the trademark for Rolls-Royce. That was held by the RR airplane division, which chose to sell it for a mere $65 million, or thereabouts, to BMW. "I would have preferred to keep both brands," VW chairman Ferdinand Piëch told *The New York Times* in July 1998, almost certainly through clenched teeth.

During this kerfuffle, there was a panic at Bentley, as the new Arnage had been designed with a BMW twin-turbo 4.4-liter V-8, and while BMW had backed off its negotiating threat to block Bentley from purchasing, nobody at VW wanted to be dependent on the enemy for powerplants. For 2000, the Arnage was briefly available with either the BMW twin-turbo engine or the "new" single-snail 6.75-liter. I say "new" because the L-series six-and-three-quarter V-8 was based on an engine that was first offered in 1959 and used continuously for what ended up being 61 years. It had a longer run than the original small-block Chevy.

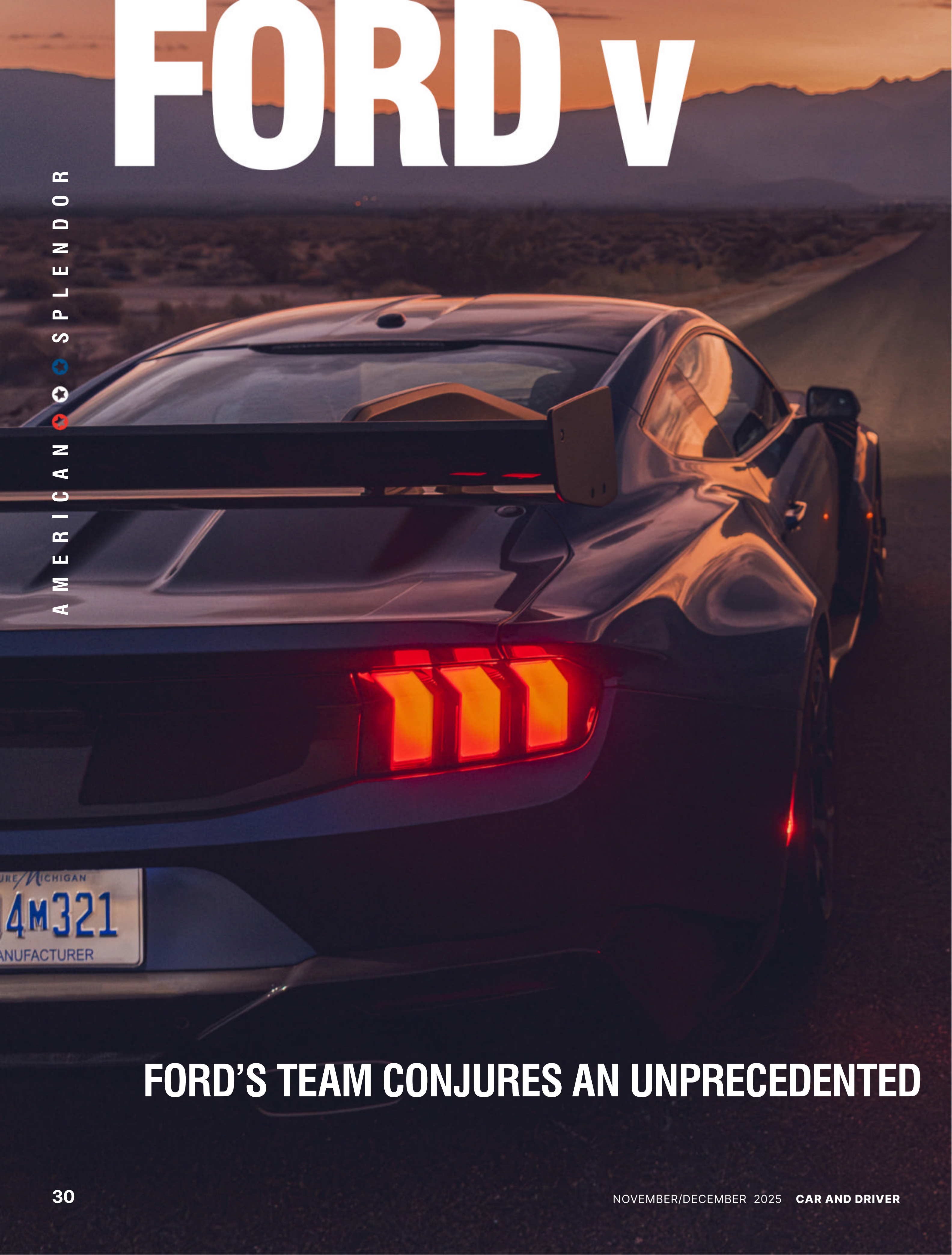
Tell people you've bought an Arnage, and they'll likely ask, "Green Label or Red Label?" It turns out, the T is neither. Green refers to the BMW-powered cars and Red to the single-turbo L-series models. By 2002, VW had mostly separated itself from BMW. My interior switchgear says otherwise, but at least in terms of powerplants, Bentley was all Bentley (or rather, all old Rolls-Royce). The 2002 T got a twin-turbo version of the 6.75-liter, good for 450 horsepower. *Car and Driver* recorded a 5.7-second 60-mph time and a 14.1-second quarter-mile. Not bad for a 5750-pound slab of English pudding.

Of course, all of this luxury and performance has a price beyond the buy-in number. The first month's outlay was a radiator hose ($90), a tow due to the radiator hose ($300), and a detailing ($600) because the interior smelled like a dead rat in a dirty gym sock. "Did someone make stew in here?" is not a question you want to hear when showing off a high-end automobile. There are a couple of other bobbles that I may or may not address. The back windows don't work, their regulators being a weak point, according to Arnage forums. But then, why fix them when the air conditioning is blasting so cold that the metal vents ice up like a frosted pint of beer?

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADAM CRUFT

AMERICAN ✪ ✪ ✪ SPLENDOR

FORD v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FREAK TO STARE DOWN PORSCHE'S BEST.

BY JARED GALL / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARC URBANO

MUSTANG VERSUS 911 is not a natural matchup. However, thanks to the Balance of Performance measures that race-sanctioning bodies employ to enhance on-track competition among diverse vehicles, Mustang versus 911 became quite contentious this year in IMSA's GTD Pro class. After the Mustang drew first blood with the class win at the season-opening Rolex 24 at Daytona in January, the two went back and forth in the standings all season long.

Rewind a few years. Ford's designers are shaping a clay model of the Mustang GT3 race car, and in walks CEO Jim Farley—a true Blue Oval fan who currently vintage-races a Shelby Cobra 289 and has campaigned a GT40. The short version of the story is that he took one look at the model and decreed a roadgoing version be built. Free from racing regulations, Ford engineers made the road car, named for the IMSA class, vastly more powerful than the race car. They added active aerodynamic elements that are not allowed in the series and fitted a pushrod-actuated rear suspension that looks like it belongs in some exotic that hopeful buyers have to prove themselves worthy of being allowed to purchase. Thoughtfully, they added a polycarbonate window in the rear bulkhead to allow occupants to watch the horizontally mounted coil-over dampers work.

Then Ford skinned nearly the whole thing in carbon fiber and demanded that hopeful buyers prove themselves worthy of shelling out no less than $327,960 for it. The automaker won't

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS
HIGHS: LIFE BEGINS AT 9000 RPM, SO MUCH PERSONALITY IT DESERVES A *DSM-5* DIAGNOSIS. **LOWS:** YOU KNOW HOW PEOPLE ARE WHEN THEY WON'T TAKE THE MEDS THEY NEED? **VERDICT:** A TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE THAT COMES WITH A LITTLE PAIN.

share the exact number of Mustang GTDs it intends to build, but we won't be surprised if it vets more than 1000 buyers. Ford also won't confirm pricing, but based on social-media leaks, the example we tested here, fitted with the $40,000 Performance package—active rear wing and front underbody flaps, dive planes, reduced sound deadening, and freakin' magnesium wheels that weren't on our car because of supply-chain issues (hey, it's a problem Porsche has had in the past too)—is about $370,000. That's a whole lotta oats for a Mustang.

The Porsche 911 GT3 RS, named for the FIA class the Mustang and 911 compete in abroad, comes up a lot when Farley is talking about the GTD. Always eager to escalate someone else's fight, we loaded technical editor Austin Irwin onto a plane to Atlanta in the days leading up to our first drive of the Mustang GTD. He picked up a GT3 RS from Porsche's North American headquarters and hustled it cross-country just in time for Ford's Mustang GTD drive program in Palm Springs, California, and the comparison Ford's CEO seems to have been asking for. Montezuma Valley Road, also known as San Diego County Highway S-22 out of Borrego Springs, felt like a good place to exercise this pair. While not a track showdown—that'll come at our Lightning Lap test—this matchup is intended to see how two race-inspired sports cars compare on the street.

The Porsche 911 GT3 RS needs no introduction. While the Mustang seemingly dropped out

Name two other roadgoing cars that say "Get out of my way" more without saying "Get out of my way."

FORD MUSTANG GTD
HIGHS: PERFORMANCE TO MATCH THE PRICE, A RIDE THAT'S EVEN MORE UNBELIEVABLE. **LOWS:** THE SAME CABIN AS A BASE MUSTANG ECOBOOST, NUMB STEERING. **VERDICT:** A $328,000 MUSTANG MIGHT SOUND ABSURD, BUT AFTER DRIVING THE GTD, WE'D SAY IT'S WORTH IT.

of the blue, Porsche has been refining the GTD's benchmark for decades. Its current iteration is the most extreme yet, with a familiar CV that includes active aero and carbon-fiber bodywork but just 518 horsepower—nearly 300 shy of the Mustang's 815. Just remember that there are two factors in a power-to-weight ratio.

Compared with the Mustang, the 911 is a bargain. (What timeline is this? I need to lie down.) Irwin's cross-country mount starts at $253,695, but with the $34,730 Weissach package (a bunch of visible carbon-fiber exterior bits, carbon-fiber anti-roll bars and underbody panels, and—hey, would you look at that—magnesium wheels that are actually on the car), $10,480 carbon-ceramic brakes, the absolutely necessary front-axle lift hardware for $3800, and a used early-2000s Mustang GT's worth of other options, this example totaled $315,775. Close enough. Montezuma Valley Road beckons.

INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

Door skins. Those, the A-pillars, and the outer roof structure are the only exterior panels the GTD shares with common Mustangs. Everything else is carbon fiber, even the rocker panels and the bumpers. As for the GT3 RS, it doesn't share a single body panel with the regular 911. Both cars commandeer what is cargo space in their lesser brethren for cooling needs, the Mustang's decklid punctuated by gaping scoops at the leading edge to feed air to the rear-mounted transaxle with metal mesh on the rear to exhaust it. Those vents on the 911's hood might appear to be part of its active aerodynamics, but no, they're just that wide open all the time, venting air from the radiator and contributing to front downforce.

Both cars look absolutely bonkers, so resolutely purposeful that each has its awkward angles and details: the Ford, its garish front-fender vents; the Porsche, the jarring way its diffuser looks not well integrated into the rear bumper. No doubt aerodynamicists for both brands are raising very different pilsners to toast their victories over the stylists. The GT3 RS has the wider rear hips of the 911 Turbo, but it looks disturbingly malnourished next to the GTD, which is more than six inches wider than not only the Porsche but also its own distant relative, the $48,555 Mustang GT.

While the GT3 RS, too, has a wing the driver can watch dance between high- and low-downforce settings in the rearview mirror, it isn't within a Nürburgring Nordschleife lap of the GTD when it comes to performance theater. If trying to watch the Mustang's rear suspension twitch and boogie while driving is too distracting, just leave the car in park and switch it into Track mode. That instantly drops the front axle 1.6 inches and the rear 1.2, visibly compressing the softer of two springs on each coil-over and nearly doubling the spring rate.

It's a good thing this act is so fascinating, because when your eyes are facing forward, this $370K Ford's cabin is nearly indistinguishable from that of a Mustang EcoBoost that costs less than one-tenth as much. Yeah, it has carbon-fiber trim on the dash. And for $10,000, you can have the shift paddles and gear-selector trim rendered in titanium. Everything else forward of the B-pillar is standard Mustang fare, which is not exactly up to snuff against even standard 911 fare.

Everything, that is, except for the Recaro seats. And after more than 2000 miles in the GT3 RS's one-piece carbon-fiber bucket, Irwin was begging

Instead of rear seats, the GTD has a fish tank so you can watch the dampers and springs swimming around (left). The Ford's dashboard (top right) is largely shared with lesser Mustangs. Porsche's shifter (bottom right) only looks like its hooked to a manual gearbox.

	2025 Ford Mustang GTD	2025 Porsche 911 GT3 RS
Base/As Tested	$327,960/$367,960	**$253,695/$315,775**
Dimensions		
Wheelbase	107.1 in	96.7 in
Length/Width/Height	193.6/81.7/55.5 in	180.0/74.8/52.1 in
Track, F/R	67.9/68.3 in	64.2/62.3 in
Passenger Volume	**52 ft^3**	49 ft^3
Cargo Volume	0 ft^3	0 ft^3

For lapping, we'd take the GT3 RS's fixed-back buckets (near left) over the GT3 RS's adjustable Recaros. But for a cross-country drive? Recaros, no doubt about it. Do you have any Advil?

for a driver change any time we dropped below cruising speed. He called the 911 "as comfortable to sit in for five minutes as it is for 30 hours" (that isn't a compliment). The GTD's Recaros don't offer quite the support of the 911's chairs—and support matters a lot in cars with limits as high as these—but the Mustang's seats are like your favorite recliner in comparison.

Pushed to the limits, the GT3 RS is the better place to be. Cinched into the seat, you feel like you've been cast into a cement mold. The controls and instrumentation are laid out simply, the paddle shifters have the positive action and reassuring snap of a staple gun, and even secondary systems like the climate controls are operated with intuitive buttons. In the Mustang, there are enough buttons on the steering wheel to overwhelm an airline pilot, and turning the HVAC on or off means tapping the touchscreen. But the GTD is hands down more comfortable for the drive to or from the track.

POWERTRAIN AND PERFORMANCE

Ford claims the GTD makes more downforce than the GT3 RS does at 150 mph, but looking at the scales, you might think it makes more downforce at 0 mph than the GT3 RS does at 150. In a way, it's close. The Porsche generates 895 pounds at 124 mph and 1896 at its drag-limited 177-mph top

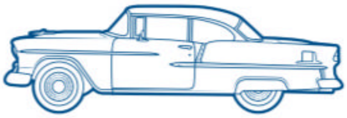
	2025 Ford Mustang GTD	2025 Porsche 911 GT3 RS
Powertrain		
Engine	supercharged DOHC 32-valve V-8 315 in^3 (5163 cm^3)	DOHC 24-valve flat-6 244 in^3 (3996 cm^3)
Power, hp @ rpm	**815** @ 7400	518 @ 8500
Torque, lb-ft @ rpm	**664** @ 4800	342 @ 6300
Redline	7650 rpm	9000 rpm
lb per hp	**5.4**	6.2
Driveline		
Transmission	8-speed dual-clutch automatic	7-speed dual-clutch automatic
Driven Wheels	rear	rear
Final-Drive Ratio:1	3.55	4.27
Chassis		
Suspension	**F:** multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	**F:** control arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Brakes	**F:** 16.5-in vented, cross-drilled ceramic disc **R:** 14.6-in vented, cross-drilled ceramic disc	**F:** 16.1-in vented, cross-drilled ceramic disc **R:** 15.4-in vented, cross-drilled ceramic disc
Stability Control	fully defeatable, traction off, competition modes, launch control	fully defeatable, traction off, competition mode, launch control
Tires	Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2R **F:** 325/30ZR-20 (102Y) FP **R:** 345/30ZR-20 (106Y) FP	Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2R Connect **F:** 275/35ZR-20 (102Y) NO **R:** 335/30ZR-21 (109Y) NO

speed with the aero in its high-downforce configuration. So, it's conceivable that 150 mph could coincide with the extra 1188 pounds of mass the GTD carries over the GT3 RS.

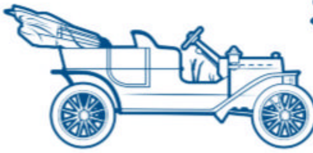
Nobody's finger twitched on the keyboard; it's correct that the Mustang is nearly 1200 pounds heavier than the 911. Heck, it's 345 pounds heavier than the outgoing GT500, and that car didn't have a single carbon-fiber fender or any holes in its trunklid. Ford attributes the added mass primarily to the wider stance, that complex rear suspension, and the supercharged 5.2-liter V-8's 15.5-quart dry-sump oiling system.

But 815 horsepower can overcome a lot of mass, and it makes the GTD the second-quickest

The Greatest American Heroes



From the Model T to the triumvirate anchoring this issue, the best American cars of all time offer innovation, experience, and performance not found anywhere else at the time. Or in some cases, they're just things of beauty. These are our favorites.



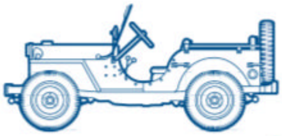
1908 Ford Model T
Puts the OG in GOAT.

1912 Cadillac Model 30
Because using a hand to crank is the worst.

1929 Duesenberg Model J
They don't call 'em doozies because of this Duesy, but they should.

1932 Ford Roadster and V8
Hot rods and a democratized V-8—power to the people.

1935 Auburn 851 Speedster
Boattailed beauty.

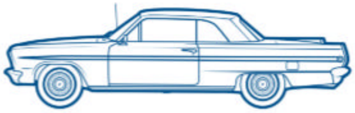


1941 Willys MB
A war hero that helped defeat fascism.

1951 Hudson Hornet
Unibody construction and NASCAR glory.

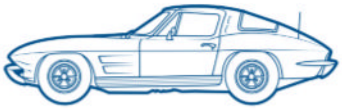
1955 Chevrolet
The prince of Bel Air; introduces the small-block V-8 alongside the '55 Corvette.

1961 Checker Marathon
Hail to the archetypal taxicab.



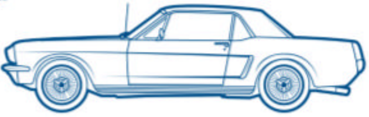
1962 Oldsmobile Jetfire
Not only did it have the first turbocharged engine in a production car, but it also had a water-injection system.

1962 Shelby Cobra
One part Brit roadster, eight parts Ford V-8, and a dash of Shelby's Chili Mix.



1963 Chevrolet Corvette Sting Ray
Design, performance, and engineering are in perfect harmony.

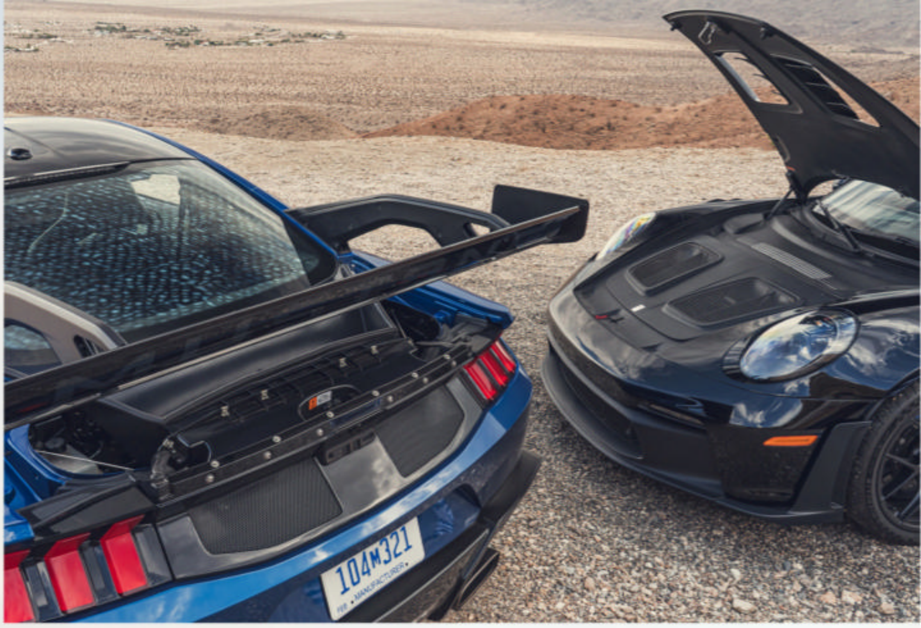
1964 Pontiac GTO
Started the muscle-car craze. We famously compared it to a Ferrari, sort of.



1965 Ford Mustang
The pony-car stampede begins.

Continued on page 49

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETE SUCHESKI

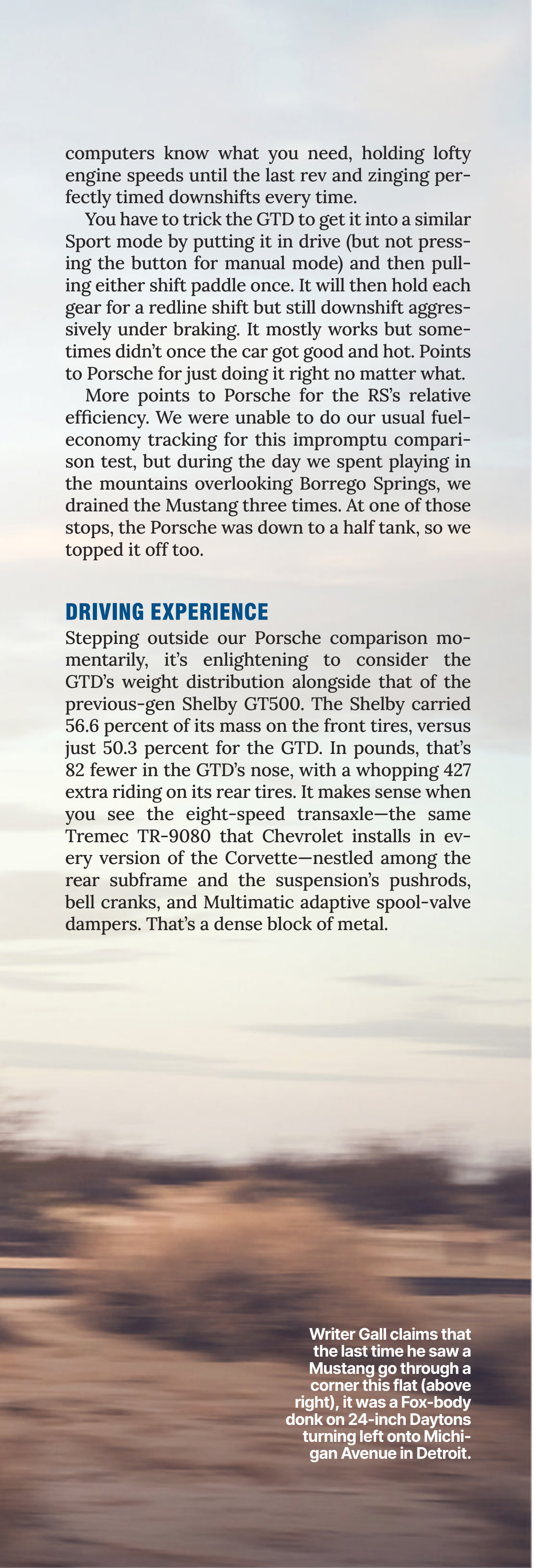


Traveling light: The GTD ditches its trunk for suspension, transmission, and cooling, while the GT3 RS loses its frunk for cooling and aero benefits.

front-engine, rear-wheel-drive car we've ever tested with a 60-mph time of 2.8 seconds and a 10.6-second quarter-mile (behind only the Ferrari 812 Superfast, with times of 2.7 and 10.4). The Porsche nips the Ford to 60 mph by 0.1 second, but the Mustang is 0.5 second ahead by 100 mph. Its 10.6-second quarter-mile at 133 mph bests the 911's by just 0.3 second, but its 6-mph advantage shows how rapidly that gap is widening. The GTD gets to 150 mph 2.5 seconds sooner than the GT3 RS. (Note that our performance figures for the Mustang are from a separate car we tested in Michigan, and the Porsche figures are from a past review of a similar car.)

The GT3 RS's 4.0-liter flat-six revs to 9000 rpm and sounds like a jet engine at takeoff; the GTD's superspeedway V-8 bellow is comparatively demure. From inside the GTD, there's only the faintest suggestion of supercharger whine, but pedestrians are treated to demonic growls as the Mustang approaches. After following the GTD on a run up S-22, Irwin extricated himself from the GT3 RS and, shocked, announced that he hadn't been able to hear the Mustang. And that, folks, is the difference between the Porsche's 105 decibels of wide-open-throttle howl and the Ford's 93.

Both cars' dual-clutch transaxles snap off shifts with breathtaking quickness, but the 911's seems stuck in a racetrack mindset when decelerating, grabbing onto first and lurching to stops no matter the drive mode. We got in the habit of breathing off the brake pedal when the car downshifted into first and easing back on as it declutched to achieve something approximating a smooth stop. Delightfully tactile as they are, though, the only reason to use those paddle shifters is ego. The



computers know what you need, holding lofty engine speeds until the last rev and zinging perfectly timed downshifts every time.

You have to trick the GTD to get it into a similar Sport mode by putting it in drive (but not pressing the button for manual mode) and then pulling either shift paddle once. It will then hold each gear for a redline shift but still downshift aggressively under braking. It mostly works but sometimes didn't once the car got good and hot. Points to Porsche for just doing it right no matter what.

More points to Porsche for the RS's relative efficiency. We were unable to do our usual fuel-economy tracking for this impromptu comparison test, but during the day we spent playing in the mountains overlooking Borrego Springs, we drained the Mustang three times. At one of those stops, the Porsche was down to a half tank, so we topped it off too.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Stepping outside our Porsche comparison momentarily, it's enlightening to consider the GTD's weight distribution alongside that of the previous-gen Shelby GT500. The Shelby carried 56.6 percent of its mass on the front tires, versus just 50.3 percent for the GTD. In pounds, that's 82 fewer in the GTD's nose, with a whopping 427 extra riding on its rear tires. It makes sense when you see the eight-speed transaxle—the same Tremec TR-9080 that Chevrolet installs in every version of the Corvette—nestled among the rear subframe and the suspension's pushrods, bell cranks, and Multimatic adaptive spool-valve dampers. That's a dense block of metal.

TEST RESULTS	2025 Ford Mustang GTD	2025 Porsche 911 GT3 RS*
Acceleration		
30 mph	1.2 sec	**1.0 sec**
60 mph	2.8 sec	**2.7 sec**
100 mph	**6.1 sec**	6.6 sec
150 mph	**14.4 sec**	16.9 sec
170 mph	**21.0 sec**	28.0 sec
1/4-Mile @ mph	**10.6 sec @ 133**	10.9 sec @ 127
	Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.2 sec.	*Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.2 sec.*
Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	**2.9 sec**	3.8 sec
Top Gear, 30–50 mph	**1.7 sec**	2.2 sec
Top Gear, 50–70 mph	**2.0 sec**	2.1 sec
Top Speed	**202 mph** (mfr claim)	184 mph (mfr claim)
Chassis		
Braking, 70–0 mph	**132 ft**	133 ft
Braking, 100–0 mph	262 ft	**251 ft**
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	**1.17 g**	1.16 g
Weight		
Curb	4404 lb	**3216 lb**
Distribution, F/R	50.3/49.7%	37.9/62.1%
Fuel		
Capacity/Octane	16.0 gal/93	**16.9 gal**/93
EPA Comb/City/Hwy	12/10/17 mpg	**16/14/18 mpg**
Sound Level		
Idle/Full Throttle	**56/93 dBA**	59/105 dBA
70-mph Cruise	**78 dBA**	79 dBA

Tested by David Beard in Chelsea, MI *Test results are from a 2023 model

Writer Gall claims that the last time he saw a Mustang go through a corner this flat (above right), it was a Fox-body donk on 24-inch Daytons turning left onto Michigan Avenue in Detroit.

Ford corrals the Mustang's mass by fitting big shoes. Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2Rs measuring 345/30ZR-20 keep the rear end in line. Even the GTD's front tires are a colossal 325/30ZR-20, or 20 millimeters wider than the rear tires on the 819-hp Ferrari 296GTB. The GTD's weight distribution and 18-wheeler's worth of contact patch grant it a balance and tenacity wholly distinct from any Mustang that came before.

And its performance envelope rivals or bests nearly anything any other carmaker builds. The GTD shades the GT3 RS by the smallest margins in the skidpad and braking tests—0.01 g and a single foot—its 1.17 g's and 132-foot stop from 70 mph both ranking among the best performances we've ever recorded. It's one thing to achieve stellar steady-state cornering numbers in a 4404-pound car and another to make it transition confidently. As massive as the Mustang looks (and is), it doesn't feel unwieldy. Zigzagging through the mountains, it stays just as flat as the 911 does. Drive the same stretch in the two cars back to back, and you'd never guess one is nearly 40 percent heavier than the other. More impressive still is the Ford's refinement. Even firmed up in Track mode, the suspension is never harsh, with no sharp edges

Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2Rs for all. Funnily enough, the Ford's front tires are nearly as wide as the Porsche's rears.

to tire impacts. The Porsche's ride is like its aero add-ons: all sharp edges.

The driver-feedback loop in the GT3 RS is a high-fidelity fire hose. Its steering is so tight and reactive that hustling it through the mountains all day had us rubbing the soreness out of our forearms over dinner. And the brakes have a progressive, mechanical feel that makes them easy to modulate. The GTD's steering is heavy but numb. Of its brakes, Irwin noted, "The pedal feels like it's been engineered as an on/off switch for track use."

The GT3 RS never stops reminding you it's been engineered for track use. Even when the Porsche is trundling through town, its tires whack and bang over tiny pavement imperfections, each beat sending a jolt through the occupants. Our hack for achieving the smoothest ride is to put the car into Track mode, which allows you to adjust compression and rebound damping front and rear and then dial all the settings to maximum softness. To find a comfortable ride in the GTD, just put it in drive. Even Track mode is more comfy than the 911's gentlest setting.

In the mountains, the Ford's calm manifests as approachability, which was shocking to us considering it's got a small reactor under its hood. The Porsche has barely half as much torque and the more linear delivery of a naturally aspirated engine, peaking 1500 rpm higher than the GTD's blown V-8. Yet, within a few turns, we were just as confident powering out of corners in the Mustang as in the 911. If only the other man-and-machine interactions with the Mustang were as rewarding as tickling its power pedal.

AND THE WINNER IS . . .

That the 911 GT3 RS handling and engine are transcendent is little surprise, considering Porsche has been honing this concept for decades. For Ford to create something as awesome, capable, and tractable as the Mustang GTD from whole cloth on its first try is undoubtedly the greater accomplishment. It was close, but if we could have only one of these cars, it would be the 911. The Porsche is utterly engrossing, a more visceral and sensory experience, alive with the feedback and mechanical magic that make us lust for cars like these. It does come with some pain, though. Days after flying home, Irwin reported that he could still feel the Porsche's seat in his back. But, he added, "it's nothing 400 milligrams of Advil can't fix." ■

Final Results

	VEHICLE									POWERTRAIN					CHASSIS						EXPERIENCE	GRAND TOTAL
	DRIVER COMFORT	ERGONOMICS	FEATURES/AMENITIES*	FIT AND FINISH	INTERIOR STYLING	EXTERIOR STYLING	REBATES/EXTRAS*	AS-TESTED PRICE*	SUBTOTAL	1/4-MILE ACCELERATION*	FLEXIBILITY*	ENGINE NVH	TRANSMISSION	SUBTOTAL	PERFORMANCE*	STEERING FEEL	BRAKE FEEL	HANDLING	RIDE	SUBTOTAL	FUN TO DRIVE	
Maximum points available	*10*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*5*	*20*	***85***	*20*	*5*	*10*	*10*	***45***	*20*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*10*	***60***	*25*	***215***
1. Porsche 911 GT3 RS	7	**9**	9	**10**	**10**	9	**1**	**20**	**75**	19	2	**10**	**10**	**41**	**20**	**10**	**10**	**10**	7	**57**	**25**	**198**
2. Ford Mustang GTD	**10**	**9**	**10**	8	6	**10**	0	17	**70**	**20**	**5**	9	9	**43**	19	8	9	9	**10**	**55**	**25**	**193**

These objective scores are calculated from the vehicles' dimensions, capacities, rebates and extras, and/or test results.

PRINTING

CZINGER
MAR California
MFG 01889 6A
dmv.ca.gov

QUEST

A CALIFORNIA COMPANY IS LOOKING TO ADVANCE THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY, ONE 3-D-PRINTED PART AT A TIME.

ALSO, WITH A HYPERCAR OR TWO.

BY DAVE VANDERWERP / PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG PAJO

PLENTY OF AUTOMAKERS have claimed to draw inspiration from fighter jets, but no vehicle has gone as far as the Czinger 21C. Here, you climb under a canopy and tuck yourself into a central driver's seat. Which is just one aspect that makes this California-built hypercar unique.

Parent company Divergent Technologies specializes in additive manufacturing, a.k.a. 3-D printing [see "CTRL + P," page 51], and has been toying with the idea of producing a car for at least a decade. Founder Kevin Czinger built a running proof of concept called the Divergent Blade that debuted in 2015 and showcased many of the company's 3-D-printed parts, an inline seating arrangement, and similar looks to the 21C that were inspired by the curves of Lola T70 racers from the 1960s. (Before founding Divergent in 2014, Kevin was a co-founder at short-lived EV maker Coda.) Divergent has raised close to a billion dollars in capital, has amassed 750 patents, and employs 450 people, roughly 120 of whom work full time on the carmaking side of the business at Czinger (pronounced "zinger").

The 21C—short for 21st century—is a hybrid. A 268-hp electric motor powers each of the car's

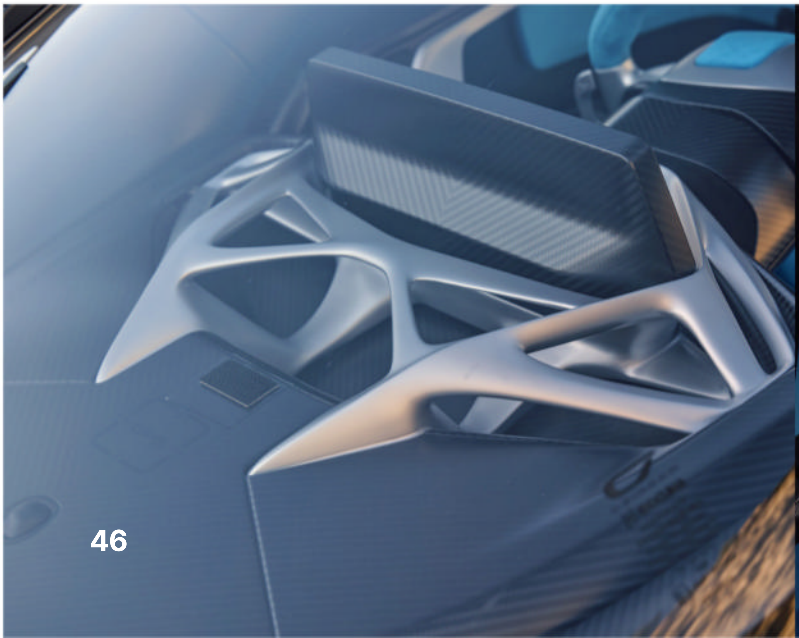
The odds of seeing a 21C on the road are about 30 million to one. Except during one week a year in Monterey, California.

front wheels, and a 750-hp twin-turbo 2.9-liter V-8 that revs to 11,000 rpm powers the rears. Combined output is a staggering 1250 horses. There's no plug, so the electric energy stored in the 4.2-kWh battery pack is primarily harvested from the gas engine by way of a 201-hp third motor that's also used to start the engine.

Despite the inline seating arrangement, the 21C has otherwise typical proportions—its wheelbase and length are about the same as a Corvette's. That doesn't leave a lot of room for a longitudinally mounted engine behind the occupants, which is why Czinger designed its own compact V-8. Being roughly as wide as other supercars yet having a cabin that's only one passenger wide leaves a lot of sill to climb over, enough to stash half of the high-voltage battery pack in each side. To get inside, you sit on the sill, swing your legs in, and then duck while simultaneously scooting into the seat. You get better at it after a few reps.

You end up deep in the machine, with a fantastic central view forward. It almost looks like we're bracing our splayed knees against the curves of the front fenders. We've never felt more like we were wearing a car. With the inline seating arrangement, the passenger's legs wrap around the front seat, but there's actually decent room in back.

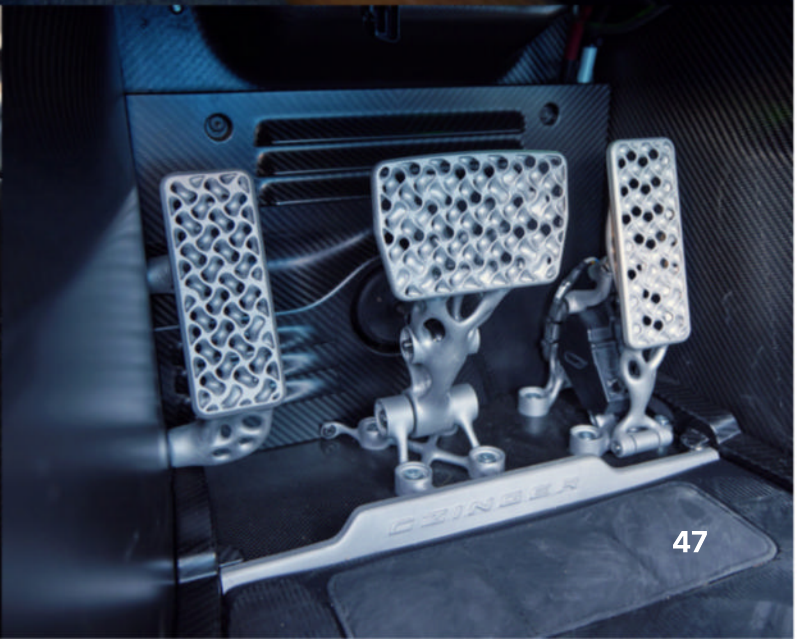
The format brings a lot of unusual details, such as having the adjustments for the side mirrors on their respective doors. There's no inside rearview mirror because you'd just be looking back at yourself. There are no cupholders or radio, but there are built-in speakers and Apple CarPlay phone pairing. The driver and passenger can enter or exit via either dihedral door, each of which is so long that it extends roughly three feet above the roofline and almost the same amount beyond the body when open. Czinger located the fuel door under the engine cover, ensuring every fuel stop is a spectacle.



The one-of-a-kind view forward is even less obstructed than this photo makes it appear. Lovely symmetry in the printed pedal array (opposite, lower right).

WARNING
8000
70

ENGINE
START/STOP


CZINGER

The feel of the primary controls is heavy and race-car-like, with meaty steering effort and brakes that require a lot of leg to actuate. The 21C is well sorted and intuitive, though. We drove only on the street but quickly found ourselves getting comfortable ripping up the endless curves of Angeles Crest Highway in Southern California, pushing harder and harder, and the chassis never bit back with anything unsettling. The thrust is unbelievably intense. The engine revs so quickly that it's hard not to run into the rev limiter—although having a digital readout for engine speed rather than an analog tachometer doesn't help. At least there are shift lights in the more aggressive modes.

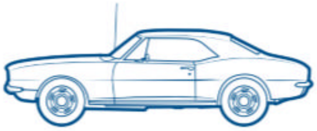
The 21C's power-to-weight ratio should yield a mid-eight-second quarter-mile time, quicker than anything we've ever tested. But, partially because of the stupefying acceleration, you notice the power gaps during upshifts of the seven-speed automated manual transmission. During routine driving, however, the gearchanges are impressively smooth, partially hidden by the front motors, which provide a boost of power when the engine is briefly between gears. The shift paddles have a great mechanical heft to them, and they actuate with a *kachunk* as satisfying as slamming closed a G-wagen's door. Throttle response is lightning quick, and a stab of the right pedal with the wheel turned can sometimes elicit a wiggle of torque steer induced by the front motors. The engine wails as we wind it out again and again to 11,000 rpm, but it's not superloud. Consider the muffler-delete option.

After the adrenaline wears off, you start to notice all the low-speed mechanical noises: the sometimes loud whining from the steering and front motors, clunks from the gearbox, and scuffing from the differential. They're not necessarily annoyances, but more a symbol of the seriousness of what you're piloting. Yet, the ride quality is reasonable, and the cabin isn't distractingly noisy during cruising. The default Street mode prioritizes electric-only driving below 60 mph; the engine runs sometimes just to generate electrical energy but isn't clutched into the rear wheels. Sport mode locks in both power sources, while Track ramps up the throttle response and motor regen. Track+ drops the suspension an inch by way of hydraulic spring perches.

Czinger's claimed curb weight of 3668 pounds might not sound light, but considering the 800-volt electric motors and battery, it is. That's

> “WE DROVE ONLY ON THE STREET BUT QUICKLY FOUND OURSELVES GETTING COMFORTABLE RIPPING UP THE ENDLESS CURVES OF ANGELES CREST HIGHWAY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, PUSHING HARDER AND HARDER, AND THE CHASSIS NEVER BIT BACK WITH ANYTHING UNSETTLING.”

The Greatest American Heroes

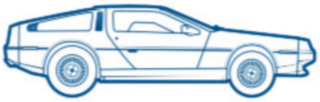


1967 Chevrolet Camaro Z/28
Homologation road-racing special.

1969 Dodge Charger Daytona/1970 Plymouth Superbird
Direct from a NASCAR superspeedway, wing and fiberglass nosecone included.

1973 Pontiac Trans Am SD-455
The last big gasp of the 1960s.

1976 Cadillac Seville
Proved that size isn’t everything and inspired design for a decade.

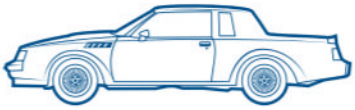


1981 DMC DeLorean
The ultimate time machine, even if it struggled to get to 88 mph.

1984 Dodge Caravan/Plymouth Voyager
Redefined the art of schlepping belongings and offspring.

1984 Jeep Cherokee
A unibody SUV way ahead of its time.

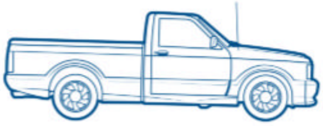
1986 Ford Taurus
Pulled American car design out of its 1970s morass; spawned hi-po SHO variant.



1987 Buick GNX
Quicker than a contemporary Corvette, the GNX is the ultimate 1980s muscle car.

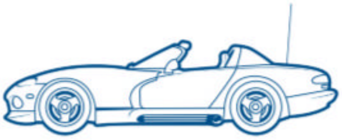
1990 Vector W8
Styling that’s a collection of straight lines. Yes, probably those lines too.

1991 Ford Explorer
The sport-utility vehicle officially becomes the family car.



1991 GMC Syclone
Did a 5.3-second rip to 60 mph, which was insane for any car in 1991, let alone a GMC pickup.

1992 Ford Crown Victoria Police Interceptor
Makes the list because of the fear it elicits when there’s one in the rearview.



1992 Dodge Viper
A Shelby Cobra for the 1990s.

1993 Cadillac STS
A 295-hp DOHC 32-valve V-8 in a sleek sedan that handled.

1994 Dodge Ram
Big-rig styling kicks off the modern pickup wars.

Continued on page 59

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETE SUCHESKI

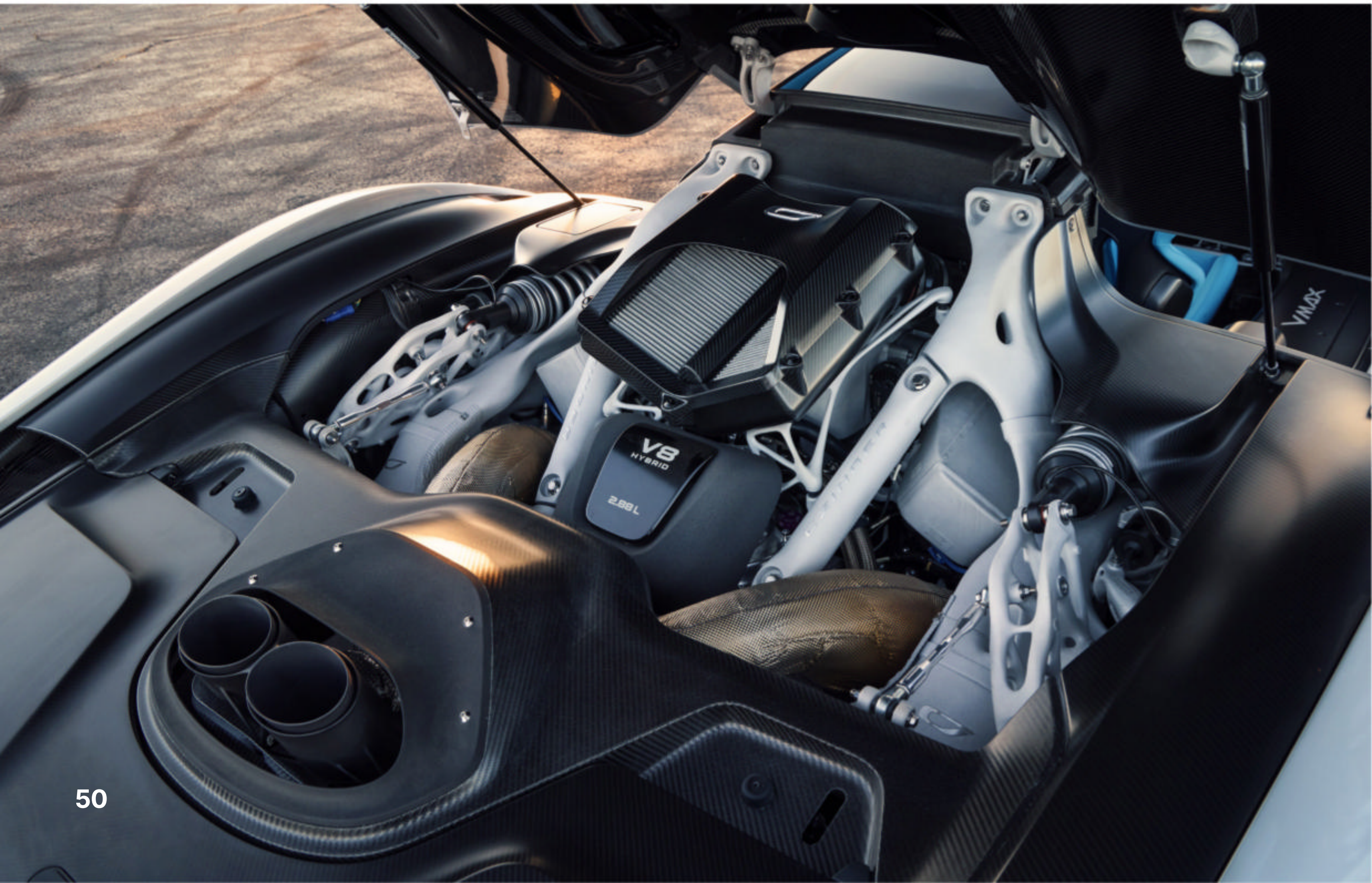
hundreds of pounds lighter than cars with a similar hybrid format, such as the Aston Martin Valhalla or the Ferrari SF90, and roughly 400 pounds less than the equally powerful Corvette ZR1X. The passenger's cell is a carbon-fiber tub, with 3-D-printed front and rear subframes. In all, there are hundreds of 3-D-printed parts that make up roughly 60 assemblies and add up to 617 pounds, or 17 percent of the car's total mass. The most striking are the spindly suspension bits that look organic, almost skeletal. It's a shame there isn't a clear-body option so they'd always be on display.

There are three variants. The 21C has a large rear wing, as does the 21C Blackbird. (The latter, an homage to Lockheed's legendary jet, gets special black paint and another 100 horsepower by way of a 101-octane engine tune.) We drove the most street-focused version, the 21C V Max, which does without the rear wing and has extended rear bodywork to smooth airflow for a higher, 253-mph claimed top speed.

Czinger plans to build 80 21Cs total. They're not quite sold out, and 10 have been delivered thus far. Both the 21C and the V Max start at $2.36 million, a price so stratospheric that no quick adjective does it justice. It's enough to scoop up a dozen Corvette ZR1s, or Civic Type Rs for you and 49 of your closest friends. And that's before options such as the $230,000 visible carbon-fiber exterior or the $40,250 carbon-fiber wheels. Most 21Cs get plenty of customization and transact around $2.7 to $2.8 million. To date, the best chance of

READY, WAIT, START

Passing emissions testing is all about the first 30 to 60 seconds following a cold start. Typical engines have a lot of turbulence in their intake tract at idle for better mixing and more complete, cleaner combustion. But that's at odds with the rapid airflow required for an engine to be able to breathe at up to 11,000 rpm as the Czinger's V-8 does. To meet ultralow emissions standards, the 21C's engine doesn't start from cold until well after you push the ignition button. First, the car draws energy from its high-voltage battery to prewarm the catalysts for 15 seconds or so. Then, the integrated motor cranks the engine at 1000 rpm for another 15 seconds. Only at this point does fuel start to flow. But the driver isn't left waiting during this warm-up period, as the 21C can drive using its front electric motors.



BIT BY BIT

CTRL + P

Additive manufacturing, or 3-D printing, is used extensively in the assembly of the 21C, and the technology is spreading to other automakers as well.

Czinger wants to show the world that there is a better, more sustainable way to manufacture cars. Eschewing the usual methods of casting, welding, and molding, as well as the traditional assembly line, it relies on 3-D printing—specifically, powder-bed fusion with selective laser melting—on a grand scale. It's part of a system that uses a host of patented methodologies developed by father-and-son team Kevin and Lukas Czinger.

To develop the shape of the 3-D-printed parts, Czinger uses artificial intelligence (AI) as an evolutionary solving algorithm, which is, in very simple terms, a computer model that simulates biological evolution to solve for *x*. You feed in the requirements—loads, aerodynamics, etc.; combined, these are the *x*—and it runs equations through a supercomputer again and again to develop and refine contours. This process leads to highly organic forms that contain the absolute minimum amount of material to do the job—including a safety factor, of course.

The Czinger crew then feeds the results into one of several bespoke 3-D printers capable of making parts as large as 27.6 by 27.6 inches. The usual alloy used in 3-D printing is too brittle for crash requirements, and the typical automotive aluminum can't survive the dramatic heating and cooling that happens as a laser melts each layer during printing, so Divergent formulated its own blend.

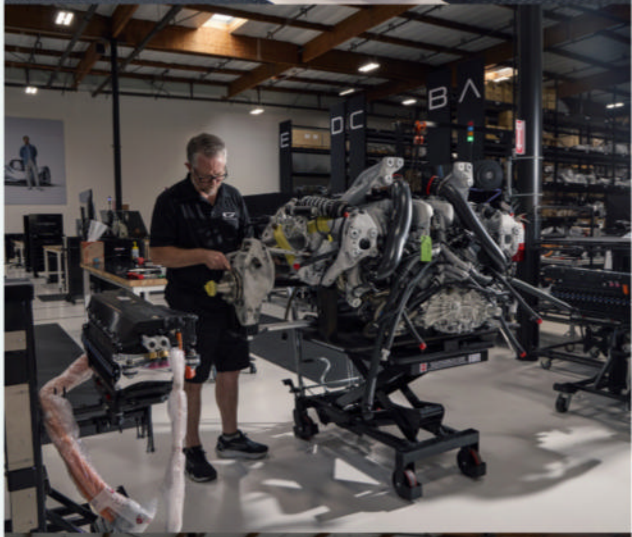
Divergent says the rate its machines can print has improved by 25 times over the past seven years, to 250 cubic centimeters of finished parts per hour with tolerances of 50 to 100 microns today. The printers run around the clock, making parts for defense and aerospace clients, Czinger, and other automakers that Divergent produces selected bits for. These include Aston Martin, Bugatti, McLaren, and a couple of others that decline to be named. Lukas tells us that while costs have decreased from "thousands of dollars to hundreds" per kilogram, another fivefold improvement—which he believes is not too many years away—is needed before these types of parts start showing up on high-volume vehicles.

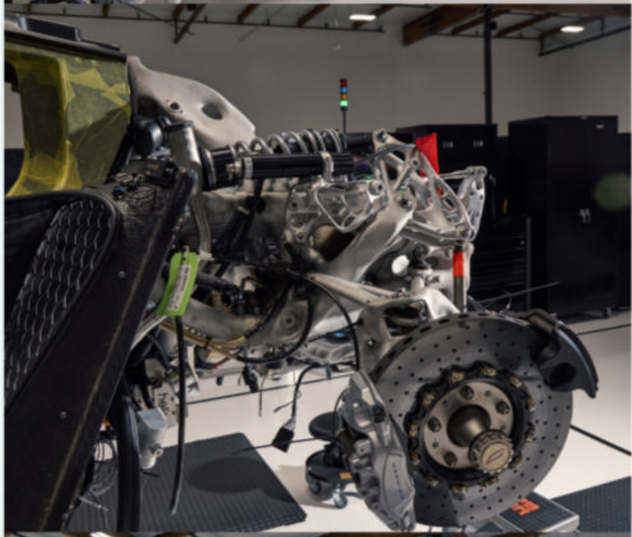
Anything larger than the print bed gets built from multiple parts in what Divergent calls the V-cell, a circular array of robots arranged around a vertical axis. The secret sauce is the precise vision feedback Divergent developed to get the tolerances down from two millimeters to 0.1 millimeter. The robots position and hold the parts in place as permanent structural adhesive bonds the pieces together.

When the parts are complete, only selected areas need minor machine spot-facing and drilling, primarily where they'll interface with another part or are joined by a fastener. If you're looking for any waste material in this process, this is about it. But it can be recycled back into aluminum powder.

Other 21C parts are designed by Czinger and built by suppliers. The carbon-fiber tub and bodywork are made in Italy using a process Czinger developed. The engine comes from a California-based outfit that builds the Czinger-designed block into a full working unit that incorporates Czinger-made pieces, including intake and exhaust bits. The transmission is Xtrac guts inside a Czinger-printed housing.

Right now, 21Cs use a braking system that features bolt-on Brembo calipers. But Czinger showed us its own elegant calipers, printed and integral with the upright, including channels for the brake fluid. Expect to see these on cars very soon. —*Dan Edmunds*





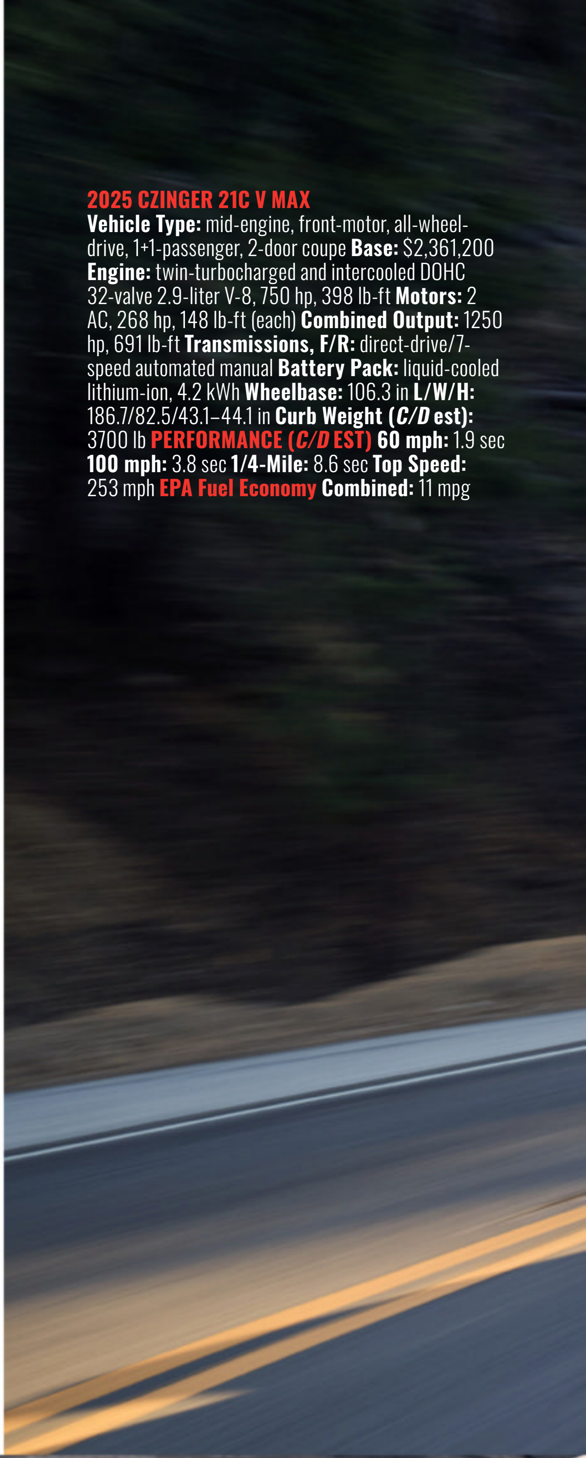
seeing one has been at the Quail, the rarefied new-car event that's part of the car spotter's paradise known as Monterey Car Week.

Although Czinger operates in a world of unsubstantiated hypercar bluster, the 21C is very real. It is emissions compliant in all 50 states [see "Ready, Wait, Start," page 50] and underwent 40 or so crash tests. A 170-page owner's manual has all manner of info, including how to install a child seat in the rear using the LATCH tether points. The manual also suggests running Michelin Pilot Sport 4S tires as a winter option, which gave us a chuckle. That is a better choice, though, than the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 "street" tire (borrowed from the 911 GT3) the car we drove was wearing or the Cup 2R track option.

Each 21C takes roughly 800 hours to craft as it rolls its way through the 12 assembly stations in Czinger's warehouse called Area 21. Making a car, especially your first one, is impossibly difficult. That's why the gorgeous details, such as carbon-fiber weave that aligns perfectly down the center around the dash, the symmetrical 3-D-printed pedal array, and the paint quality that's well above the automotive norm, are even more extraordinary. Not to mention how capably the 21C can carve up a road.

To prove just how ruthlessly quick the 21C is, Czinger set production-car lap records every day for five days this past July at racetracks in California: Thunderhill, Sonoma, Laguna Seca, Willow Springs, and Thermal Club. And, accentuating the 21C's streetability, they drove the car from one track to the next. In 2024, the 21C set a new record at the Circuit of the Americas.

Czinger is hard at work on its second car, and although the company has shown four-seat and sport-utility concepts, CEO Lukas Czinger says the next model will also be a hypercar. We expect to be impressed all over again. ▪



2025 CZINGER 21C V MAX
Vehicle Type: mid-engine, front-motor, all-wheel-drive, 1+1-passenger, 2-door coupe **Base:** $2,361,200 **Engine:** twin-turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 32-valve 2.9-liter V-8, 750 hp, 398 lb-ft **Motors:** 2 AC, 268 hp, 148 lb-ft (each) **Combined Output:** 1250 hp, 691 lb-ft **Transmissions, F/R:** direct-drive/7-speed automated manual **Battery Pack:** liquid-cooled lithium-ion, 4.2 kWh **Wheelbase:** 106.3 in **L/W/H:** 186.7/82.5/43.1–44.1 in **Curb Weight (*C/D* est):** 3700 lb **PERFORMANCE (*C/D* EST)** **60 mph:** 1.9 sec **100 mph:** 3.8 sec **1/4-Mile:** 8.6 sec **Top Speed:** 253 mph **EPA Fuel Economy** **Combined:** 11 mpg

The folks at the Friday-morning meetup at Newcomb's Ranch on Angeles Crest Highway (lower left) were shocked to see a 21C, wowed by both the car and the fact that our six-foot-five driver fit in it.

CZINGER
California
01889

A STAR IS BORN

WE SURVEY DETROIT'S TRANSFORMATION FROM THE DRIVER'S SEAT OF CADILLAC'S HEAVENLY NEW FLAGSHIP, THE $360,890 CELESTIQ.

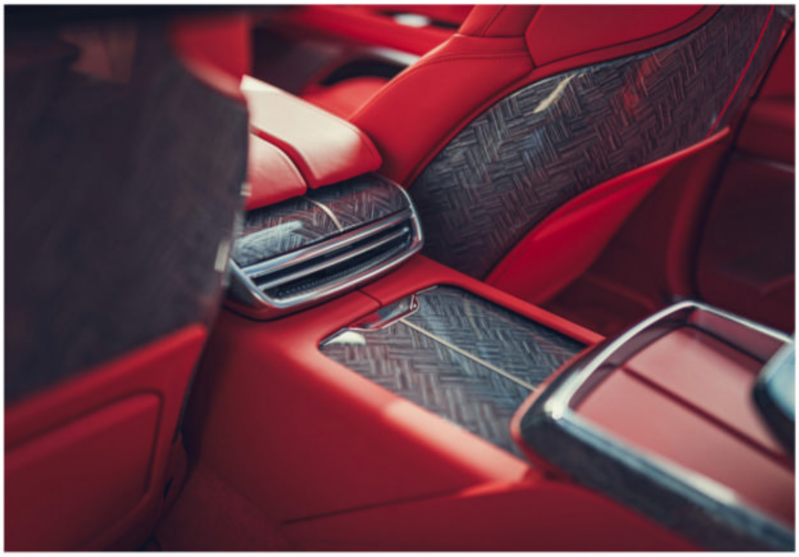
BY EZRA DYER / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL SIMARI AND MARC URBANO

ROCKET Mortgage
CHASE
Farmer
EY
Farmer

AROUND THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM, I made my first trip to Detroit and told the local editor I met I was amazed there were so many parking spots available on the street. “There’s a reason for that,” he replied ominously. About 10 years later, I was driving through Detroit in a Chrysler 300C and got the notion to investigate whether any houses were for sale for less than the price of the car. The answer was yes, all of them. One five-bedroom was listed for $7000. My most recent trip to downtown Detroit before this one was in 2015, and even then, I took a photo of a broken trash can overflowing garbage onto the sidewalk with a boarded-up building across the street. I mention all of this not to denigrate Detroit but to underscore how dramatically it has transformed itself, how vastly the scope of its ambitions has shifted in the past 25 years. Detroit is charting a return to glory that, if not quite complete, is impressive as hell and closely parallels the upward trajectory of one of the city’s most revered brands: Cadillac. So, what better place to take Cadillac’s new $360,890 flagship, the Celestiq?

Well, Monaco, sure. You’re far more likely to see a Celestiq, if you see one at all, in one of the more obvious bastions of wealth, like Malibu or Miami, than on Woodward Avenue. But Cadillac was named after the founder of Detroit, Antoine Laumet de la Mothe, sieur de Cadillac, and the company celebrates rather than downplays the Celestiq’s domestic provenance. Each Celestiq is hand-built at General Motors’ Artisan Center in Warren, Michigan, and if you want to spec yours in person, you’ll go to the Cadillac House at Vanderbilt, also in Warren. (Or do it over Zoom from Mustique, or wherever you have a fifth home.)

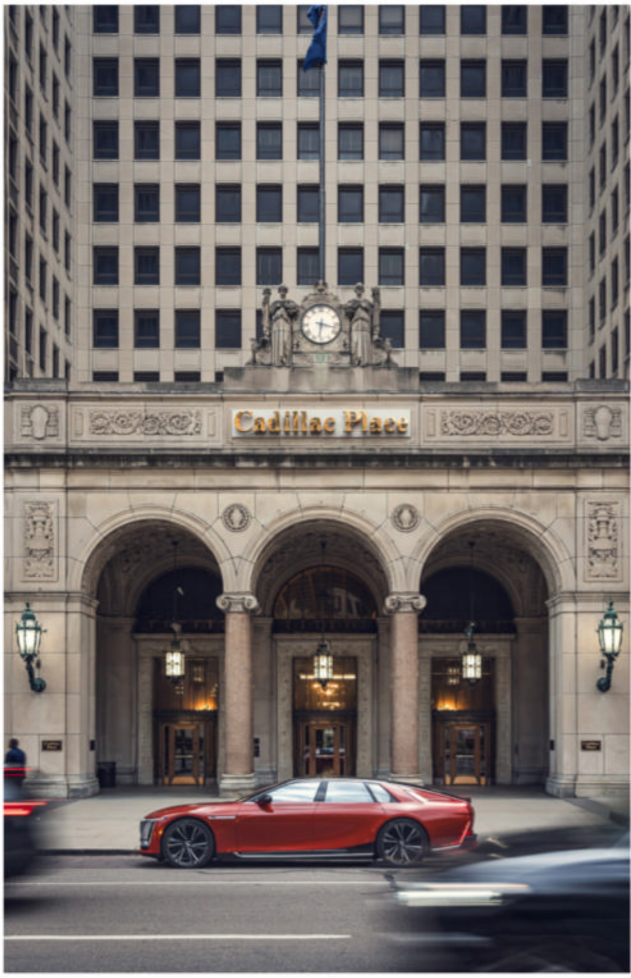
The Celestiq buyer will find that there are plenty of decisions to make. Cadillac says no two Celestiqs will be identical, and that’s easy to believe when each is a custom commission, labor intense in the extreme. When it comes to paintwork, leather, and trim, your wish is Cadillac’s command, assuming your net worth is high enough. It’s hard to break new ground in the realm of interior extravagance, but the Celestiq showcases some original ideas in over-the-top cabin finery. Consider the optional trim made from recycled newspapers and ash wood, dyed gray and cut into marquetry—you won’t encounter that on a lowly Escalade. In keeping with the celestial theme, this decorative addition is called Uranus. As your build concierge might awkwardly inform you, it’ll cost $25,700 to put Uranus in your car, and that’s just on the seatbacks. The stuff on the console is another $4000. Few people will ever own a car with this trim, and that’s kind of the point.

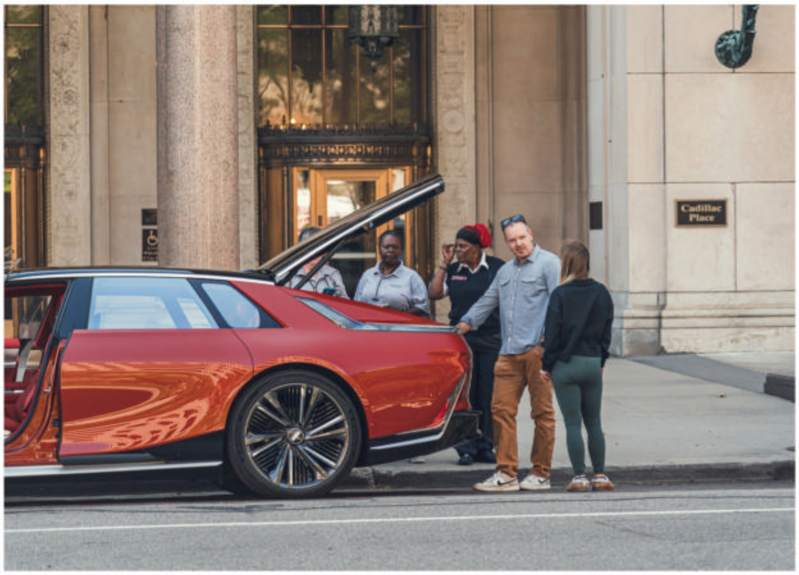


We saw Uranus every time we opened the door of the Celestiq—that’s the name of this gray trim, which is made with recycled newspapers and costs $29,700.

Cadillac Place was named for Detroit's founder, Antoine Laumet de la Mothe, sieur de Cadillac. He was once charged with trafficking alcohol and furs, and he probably would have loved the Celestiq's Bahia Orange interior.

STANDARD OF THE WORLD


Cadillac Place



Dyer tries to sell the Celestiq to curious onlookers, stressing its hatchback versatility and pointing out that for just $1000 a month, you could own this baby in a little more than 34 years.

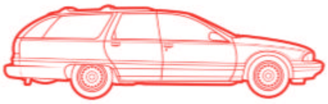
As decadent as the interior is—with only four seats in a hatchback that's longer than a Chevy Tahoe—it's the avant-garde fastback exterior that'll sell the car. At least, that's my impression at my first destination, Cadillac Place. Originally the General Motors Building and now home to state government offices, it's a spectacular building, 1.3 million square feet of neoclassical and art deco glamour designed by Albert Kahn and restored to its former glory in 2002. The lane out front is a no-parking zone, but the ultimate Cadillac gets a pass at Cadillac Place. Security guards come out to examine this most bombastic flex from the hometown team. Pedestrian traffic halts as Detroiters take it all in, and there's a lot to take. "You gotta have some top money to drive something like that!" observes one passerby. I find myself frequently repeating the figure $416,705, which is this car's sticker price. I rattle off a list of features and tell one onlooker that the Celestiq has a lot going on. "Four hundred sixteen thousand, it better have a lot going on!" he replies.

The Celestiq isn't lacking in confidence. Opening the console cupholder reveals a piece of metal trim depicting the silhouettes of the 1934 Cadillac V-16 Aerodynamic Coupe, the 1957 Eldorado Brougham, and the Celestiq—two old legends and, Cadillac hopes, one for the future. Bolts for the door hinges are emblazoned with the words "Standard of the World." The console scroll wheel is crystal and features a likeness of the Cadillac Goddess, a symbol not used since the 1950s. This is a car for industrialists who describe their vocations with a single noun: "steel," or "pipelines," or "semiconductors."

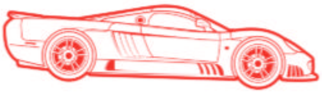
It's been a long time since GM had anything to offer that cohort, and it's been a long time since Detroit was anywhere those people would want to go. But rolling down Woodward Avenue, I can't believe my eyes—did I just see a Rolls-Royce in front of a Gucci store? Indeed. We drive over to another

ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETE SUCHESKI

The Greatest American Heroes



1996 Buick Roadmaster
The last big, three-row American station wagon. John Phillips had Lingenfelter install a 415-hp V-8 in Chevy's version, the Caprice wagon.



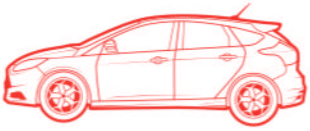
2003 Saleen S7
A $401K 550-hp mid-engine supercar in 2003; that's about $1000 per louver.

2005 Ford GT
A near-perfect homage to the four-peat Le Mans winner from the '60s.

2008 Chevrolet Cobalt SS
A front-drive wonder on the unlikeliest of econocar platforms.

2011 Cadillac CTS-V Sport Wagon
Wagon? Check. Supercharged 556-hp V-8? Check. Six-speed manual? Check. Cadillac's love letter to enthusiasts that has only improved with age.

2012 Tesla Model S
Single-handedly established and validated the modern electric car.



2013 Ford Focus ST
A performance Focus that handled so well, it beat the VW GTI in a comparison test.

2016 Ford Mustang Shelby GT350
A Mustang with an 8250-rpm redline makes total sense to us.

2020 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray
The long-awaited switch to a mid-engine platform elevates the Corvette's game.

2022 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing
In 2004, Cadillac's V division set out to beat the BMW M3; it took nearly 20 years, but CT4-V Blackwing accomplished the goal without question.

2022 Cadillac CT5-V Blackwing
The best V-8 sports sedan ever made, American or otherwise.

2025 Chevrolet Corvette ZR1
As everyman as 1064 horses gets.

2025 Lucid Air Sapphire
Quickest car we've tested: hits 60 mph in 1.9 seconds and traps a quarter-mile in 9.1 seconds traveling at 155 mph.

GM landmark, the Renaissance Center, and the restaurant at street level is packed with Ladies Who Lunch gawking out the window at the Celestiq. Tourists throng the Riverwalk, and everything is clean and nice. The last time I was at this specific spot was when GM was throwing a party in the mid-2000s. I'd walked the mile from my hotel, at night, cops slow-rolling past and staring at me. When I arrived at the party, a GM rep asked how I got there, and when I told her, she said, "You *walked*?" I didn't know that was a bad idea.

Now, the downtown streets are busy, prosperous. Tigers fans stream onto the streetcars that efficiently whisk them to and from Comerica Park. The Lions also play downtown and have recently enjoyed their best seasons in decades. That boarded-up building I saw in 2015 is now luxury apartments. We waft our way up Woodward to the historic Boston-Edison neighborhood and shamelessly gawk at Kahn's former mansion, which sold last year for nearly $2 million. Across the street, workers rehabbing another old estate shamelessly gawk at the Celestiq. There's usually class friction when a neighborhood gentrifies, but the comeback I see here feels purely celebratory. It wasn't too long ago that Detroit suffered an annual tradition devoted to arson—read up on Devil's Night—so it's hard to complain about the return of community pride.

It's hard to complain about the Celestiq, either, but I can see a few aspects that will provoke controversy. For one thing, its powertrain: dual electric motors, 655 horsepower, and a 111-kWh battery. GM claims 60 mph in 3.7 seconds, and that feels plausible. The Celestiq is also quick for a machine that weighs 6856 pounds, but GM obviously wasn't trying for hyperbolic performance stats. Should it have? I don't know. Maybe it wouldn't have made sense to give the Celestiq 2000 horsepower, but I also don't know that it makes sense for GM to build a Chevy pickup that is both quicker and more powerful than its $400,000 flagship for the ages.

Perhaps I'm thinking too rationally about an irrational car, or maybe I'm simply thinking like someone who doesn't buy cars this expensive, but the Celestiq's best-of-everything theme simply doesn't extend to the powertrain, traditionally a defining feature of cars of this ilk. Yes, electric propulsion is ideally suited to a luxury limo—witness the 646 pound-feet of torque delivered in near silence—but electric motors will never make for a bragging point in the manner of, say, a V-16. Back in 1934, you couldn't buy a Chevy with roughly the same power and refinement as the Cadillac halo car, but electrification has democratized heroic powertrains.

Wipe your feet, because those Eucalyptus floor mats cost $1520. Also do that before stepping into architect Albert Kahn's 11,103-square-foot mansion.

So forget brute acceleration and revel in supernatural chassis behavior. Air springs, magnetorheological dampers, and active anti-roll bars deliver a serene ride, along with surprisingly crisp handling. The 130.2-inch wheelbase helps quell any seesaw ride motions, and four-wheel steering lends agility in tight corners. Even wearing huge 23-inch wheels, the Celestiq feels like it's scouring Detroit's battered pavement with 400-grit sandpaper.

The hovercraft ride is in harmony with the cabin's obsequious luxury. Utmost comfort is the stated goal, and each of the Celestiq's four seats can exist in its own microclimate of agreeable circumstances. All four doors are power operated via discreet exterior buttons, and sitting behind the wheel and depressing the brake causes the driver's door to swing closed, no commands required. Inside, you can open and close the doors via touchscreen sliders, and radar units within each door ensure they don't open into a curb or wall. The rear hatch—yes, the Celestiq is King of All Hatchbacks—opens and closes with a press of the Cadillac badge beneath the lid.

Once ensconced in the driver's seat, you have nearly unlimited adjustment options. Want to air-condition the bottom cushion but heat the backrest while getting a massage? No problem. The armrest is also heated, as is the steering wheel. Each quadrant of the electrochromatic roof can be individually tinted across a range of opacities. Sick of air blowing directly in your face? Set the vents to oscillating mode. Having a tough time conversing with a passenger way back yonder? Engage intercom mode, and a microphone picks up your discourse and broadcasts it to speakers at the other seat—"Watson, come here!" Of course, the interior lighting (which includes striping across the panoramic roof) can be set to a range of moods, with illumination schemes paired to drive modes, if you choose. There's a V button on the steering wheel that summons maximum thrust from the powertrain, so pair that one to the red motif, maybe.

If there's an aesthetic off-note, it's the 55-inch display that spans the dash. Perhaps there was a time when a huge dash screen connoted futurism and luxury, but it just isn't that impressive nowadays, when we all know you can go to Best Buy and get a 55-inch high-definition TV for $200. It's an Apple Watch approach in a car that's courting a Rolex crowd.

But Apple Watches are useful, and I do appreciate the Celestiq's expansive navigation display as I make my way across town to check out Michigan Central Station, a place once described as "America's most famous ruin." Ford restored the site from 2018 to 2024. The building's transformation is staggering, illustrated by a photo gallery inside showing the former crumbled, graffiti-covered shambles that Ford tackled. Now Michigan Central is a symbol of Detroit's comeback, even though it's no longer a functioning train station. There are offices, retail stores, and tourists like me coming to admire the gleaming palatial lobby. It's a larger-than-life place that's still figuring itself out, sort of like the city itself.

Celebrity
Soft Cloth
Car Wash
YOUR
GOALS
ARE
ACHIEVABLE
OPEN
STOP
Blaine
Woodward

You've got to embrace a positive worldview to think you might someday own a Celestiq. And that also goes for the company building it.

And the Celestiq is a larger-than-life car. We've watched Cadillac evolve from front-wheel-drive mediocrity to Blackwing excellence along a timeline that tracks Detroit's own revival. Twenty-five years ago, who'd have thought Cadillac could even attempt to compete with Rolls-Royce? And who'd have thought downtown Detroit would turn into a hot place to live? I ponder these happy changes in fortune as I circle the block around GM's slick new headquarters in the Hudson's building on Woodward. I want to go in and check it out, but I can't find a parking space.

2025 CADILLAC CELESTIQ
Vehicle Type: front- and rear-motor, all-wheel-drive, 4-passenger, 4-door hatchback
Base: $360,890 **Motors:** 2 permanent-magnet synchronous AC **Combined Output:** 655 hp, 646 lb-ft
Transmissions: direct-drive **Battery Pack:** liquid-cooled lithium-ion, 111 kWh **Peak Charge Rate, AC/DC:** 19.2/190 kW **Wheelbase:** 130.2 in **L/W/H:** 217.2/79.7/57.2 in ***C/D* Curb Weight:** 6856 lb
PERFORMANCE (*C/D* EST) **60 mph:** 3.5 sec **100 mph:** 9.0 sec **1/4-Mile:** 12.1 sec
Top Speed: 130 mph **EPA Fuel Economy** **Combined/Range:** 81 MPGe/303 mi

swold
TURNING VEHICLES
TO

HERE, THERE, EVERY

Grand River

WHERE

Whether you're looking to start a family or break out on your own, these subcompact crossovers are your stepping stone to a new chapter.

BY ANDREW KROK / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL SIMARI

IT'S TIME TO GROW UP.

Transitioning into the adulting portion of life comes with a lot of change. The First National Bank of Mom and Dad might be on permanent holiday. You may have found yourself with a fancy new job—that just so happens to be on the other side of the country. Maybe you fell in love along the way and started cross-shopping strollers in your downtime. No matter which path to maturity you may wander down, you'll probably want a fresh set of wheels to help usher in this new stage of the journey.

That's where this test's seven subcompact crossovers come in. They're some of the most affordable vehicles on the market, they offer decent cargo capacity, and eager buyers can't help but scoop 'em up left and right.

We put together a collection of recently refreshed or (in one case) introduced models and some longtime favorites, and we drove them into the heart of Detroit, hitting our 10Best evaluation loop along the way. Some of these SUVs prove better suited for, say, a single urbanite, while others cater to a budding family in the burbs. Here's how they stack up.

FOX
BUICK
075M026

7th PLACE: SUBARU CROSSTREK

Associate news editor Jack Fitzgerald likened the Crosstrek to the student sitting in the middle of the classroom. The Subaru isn't the front-row star answering every question, but it's also not sitting in the back cracking jokes or going off to sneak heaters in the bathroom.

The Crosstrek has a unique powertrain combination for this segment, a continuously variable automatic transmission (CVT) bolted to a 182-hp 2.5-liter flat-four. Its 7.8-second jaunt to 60 mph puts it squarely midpack, and its on-road dynamics are in pretty much the same spot. While the CVT and engine response felt more alive than some of the conventional automatics in this test, it wasn't exactly engaging, and even with its simulated gearchanges, it still tends to create some gnarly engine drone. And there's no escaping that noise; at idle, the Crosstrek was the loudest car here. The doors feel insubstantial, as though they're more plastic than metal, and that sort of iffy material quality extends to the unnecessarily large and obvious empty space around the shifter, as well as to the steering wheel, which is made from Temu-grade plastic.

Pull up more figures, and the Subaru continues to land somewhere around the mean value. Cargo space? Midpack. Quarter-mile time? Midpack. Braking? You guessed it: midpack. Price? At $31,651 as tested, even the number on the window sticker lands on the meatiest part of the bell curve. The vertical screen is unique, but its glacial boot-up and response times are among the worst in the group, so we'll call that a wash.

Most of the cars on this list have at least one trait that helps them stand out. The Subaru never rises to the top, but its all-around decent nature may be the kind of no-fuss, appliance-adjacent vehicular experience you're after.

SUBARU CROSSTREK PREMIUM

Highs: Low-speed CVT response, good forward visibility, comfortable ride. Lows: Coarse engine note, cheap finishes, 2011 infotainment speeds. Verdict: Does a few things well but nothing exceptionally.

The Crosstrek scores well in the ride and driver-comfort areas, and the rest is subjectively mid.

6th PLACE: HYUNDAI KONA

Once upon a time, the Hyundai Kona was slightly dwarfed by its platform-mate, the Kia Seltos. But for 2024, the Kona had a major growth spurt. Its length increased by about half a foot, and its wheelbase was extended by a couple of inches. The result? A more spacious and practical vehicle than before, but one that did incur some trade-offs.

The Hyundai's embiggening didn't increase the SUV's cargo space; both the Kona and the Seltos can fit seven carry-on-sized boxes behind the second row, and the Seltos has a one-box advantage with the back seats laid flat. Bigger in this case also means heavier, as evidenced by the Kona's 3470-pound curb weight, the heftiest porker in this seven-SUV pen.

	2025 Buick Envista Avenir	2025 Chevrolet Trax Activ
Base/As Tested	$25,195/$32,010	**$21,895/$27,585**
Dimensions		
Wheelbase	106.3 in	106.3 in
Length/Width/Height	182.6/71.5/61.3 in	178.6/71.8/61.4 in
Track, F/R	61.3/61.6 in	61.5/62.1 in
Passenger Volume, F/R	51/44 ft^3	51/45 ft^3
Cargo Behind, F/R	42/21 ft^3	54/26 ft^3

Its 190-hp turbocharged 1.6-liter inline-four's mediocre motivation is reflected in the SUV's 7.6-second sprint to 60, a half-second behind the 138-pound-lighter Seltos. That said, the Kona proved to be an overachiever on our 75-mph highway fuel-economy loop, where it achieved 35 mpg, far exceeding its 29-mpg EPA highway estimate.

Logbook entries reinforced that the Kona is clearly happiest on the highway, where its size made it feel calm and composed. But that calm extends further into its performance than we'd like. On the 10Best loop, the Kona felt heavy in the corners, and the eight-speed automatic's aggressive upshifting behavior made the car seem underpowered. Putting it into Sport mode remedies that

Korean import Hyundai Kona dusts "homegrown" Buick Envista by more than a second to 60 mph. We didn't have the heart to tell Detroit's onlookers the Buick is built in Korea too.

2025 Hyundai Kona Limited AWD	**2025 Kia Seltos SX Turbo AWD**	**2025 Mazda CX-30 Carbon Turbo AWD**	**2025 Subaru Crosstrek Premium**	**2025 Volkswagen Taos SE Black FWD**
\$35,095/\$35,335	\$32,585/\$33,575	\$34,635/\$35,220	\$29,230/\$31,651	\$32,070/\$32,525
104.7 in	103.5 in	104.4 in	105.1 in	105.5 in
171.3/71.9/63.4 in	172.6/70.9/63.4 in	173.0/70.7/61.7 in	176.4/70.9/63.0 in	175.9/72.5/65.1 in
62.6/62.9 in	61.3/61.9 in	61.5/61.5 in	61.2/61.2 in	61.8/60.8 in
52/**47 ft^3**	51/46 ft^3	51/43 ft^3	**55**/44 ft^3	52/45 ft^3
64/26 ft^3	63/**27 ft^3**	45/20 ft^3	55/20 ft^3	60/25 ft^3

with more aggressive gear selection, but a middle ground would be preferable.

The Kona was easily the most feature-packed car of the bunch in its top Limited trim, but our all-wheel-drive test car bore a $35,335 price, making it the most expensive as well. Skip the gray, almost-white-looking interior; a lack of color and material variation in the door panels makes the cabin feel like an unfinished coloring book. If you have small children, hide the crayons.

HYUNDAI KONA LIMITED AWD
Highs: Looks like a spaceship, vast second-row room, skinflint at the pump.
Lows: Only loves going straight, carries less cargo than its sibling, bloody expensive in top trim.
Verdict: Cool as a cucumber, maybe too cool.

5th PLACE: BUICK ENVISTA

A close examination of the Buick Envista reveals it to be a Chevrolet Trax with a nicer metaphorical coat of paint and some upscale badging. But is it worth the $4425 as-tested upcharge? Well, you haven't read about the Chevy yet, so you can probably guess the answer.

Nearly all that extra money appears to have been spent on the front half of the Envista's cabin. The materials are an upgrade over what's in the Trax, though the Buick's 11.0-inch touchscreen has an uglier and more prominent bezel. The two vehicles are functionally identical in the back row, save for the Buick's fold-down center armrest. Like the Trax, all-wheel-drive is not available.

When it comes to cargo space, the Envista is actually the worse of the two; its truncated (but stylish) rear end reduces storage from 21 boxes to 19 when the back seats are folded.

The Buick also carries more sound deadening, as evidenced by the noticeable one- to two-decibel advantage over the Chevy in our three sound-level tests. While these twins wield the same wheezy 137-hp turbo three, the Envista carries an extra 83 pounds of mass, resulting in a 0.3-second-slower run to 60 mph, a lengthy 8.8 seconds.

That slicked-back silhouette paid off on the highway, though, where the Buick returned 33 mpg in our hands, besting both its EPA estimate and the Chevy's result by 1 mpg.

There is one hidden feature on the Envista that the Trax doesn't have, and it's a surprising but welcome one. The top-shelf Avenir trim, which contributed to a reasonable $32,010 as-tested price for our vehicle, adds a Watt's linkage to the

Like its New Mexico namesake, the Taos (left) is a laid-back experience. Both it and the Buick Envista (below) have the room to carry you and four friends into the desert for a camping trip.

rear torsion-beam suspension. The ride is softer, but more interestingly, the linkage also provided the Envista with more satisfying cornering behavior around our evaluation loop.

4th PLACE: VOLKSWAGEN TAOS

If you need a box on wheels that can empty your local Costco's shelves every Saturday morning, the VW Taos should be on your shortlist. In our carry-on-sized-box test, the Taos was top of the pops, swallowing nine with the rear seats up and a whopping 25 with the second row folded.

Our SE Black test model is the high-spec front-wheel-drive trim, and at $32,525 as tested, it represents one of the more affordable higher trims in this group of crossovers.

The Taos underwent some changes for 2025 but could use more. Its turbocharged 1.5-liter four-cylinder makes 174 horsepower, a 16-pony bump, but its 8.2-second 60-mph time was the worst of the four-banger cohort. Only the three-cylinder GM twins proved slower overall. Volkswagen also claims that it improved cabin noise, but the refreshed Taos is two decibels noisier at 70 mph than the old front-wheel-drive version, and it was somewhere in the middle of the pack under wide-open throttle among these competitors.

Volkswagen continues its tradition of above-average fit and finish in the Taos. There's a pleasing variation in materials and colors inside. While the touch-sensitive climate controls are not our favorite (we wear gloves in the winter), and we may not love the latest iteration of VW's infotainment,

BUICK ENVISTA AVENIR

Highs: A little luxury in the segment, sharp exterior styling, simple HVAC controls. **Lows:** Emphasis on "a little" luxury, silhouette eats into stowage, costs more than the closely related Trax. **Verdict:** We still don't fully grasp where that extra $4425 is going.

the steering wheel has real-deal buttons, and the digital instrument cluster is clear and easy to read.

On the 10Best loop, the Taos lacked the verve and fun-to-drive dynamics that VW used to tout as *Fahrvergnügen*. The Taos's shipping-container looks seem to have seeped into its handling. It felt overly tall and tippy, and under acceleration, the steering tugs and hunts despite the engine's modest output. The suspension hews to the traditionally German side of the stiffness-compliance spectrum, sending high-frequency impacts into the cabin, so it wasn't exactly a logbook darling on anything but freshly laid roadways.

VOLKSWAGEN TAOS SE BLACK
Highs: Built like a shipping container, solid interior quality, not priced to the ceiling.
Lows: Handles like a shipping container, could use more power, torque steer is still a thing.
Verdict: A hauler, not a handler.

3rd PLACE: KIA SELTOS

That's right: The older Kia Seltos is ahead of the newer, longer-wheelbase Hyundai Kona. Size isn't everything, folks.

The Seltos, seen here in top SX all-wheel-drive trim, has the same 190-hp turbo four as the Kona. But since the Kia has a 138-pound advantage, it accelerates more quickly than the Hyundai. Yes, its eight-speed automatic also upshifts too early in its quest to improve fuel economy, but the Seltos's 7.1-second sprint to 60 shaves a half-second off the Hyundai's time. It's not as thrifty as the Hyundai, but it's close; we saw 32 mpg in our highway fuel-economy test, a 5-mpg bump over its EPA highway estimate but 3 mpg below its bigger stepsibling.

Smaller dimensions and a better power-to-weight ratio mean the Kia is more fun to chuck around than the Hyundai, and it isn't even close. The controls respond with a sporty sharpness so sharp, some participants bemoaned occasional head bob with normal inputs. The car's eagerness to turn in can also lead to the whole package always feeling energetic, which could get annoying if you prefer a more sedate commute.

The Kona may have the cooler space-force exterior aesthetic, but the Seltos manages to pack more character into the cabin. Its crumpled-paper-lookin' speaker grilles are fun, and there

	2025 Buick Envista Avenir	2025 Chevrolet Trax Activ
Powertrain		
Engine	turbocharged DOHC 12-valve inline-3 73 in^3 (1199 cm^3)	turbocharged DOHC 12-valve inline-3 73 in^3 (1199 cm^3)
Power, hp @ rpm	137 @ 5000	137 @ 5000
Torque, lb-ft @ rpm	162 @ 2500	162 @ 2500
Redline	6000 rpm	6000 rpm
lb per hp	22.9	22.3
Driveline		
Transmission	6-speed automatic	6-speed automatic
Driven Wheels	front	front
Final-Drive Ratio:1	3.53	3.53
Chassis		
Suspension	**F:** struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** torsion beam, coil springs	**F:** struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** torsion beam, coil springs
Brakes	**F:** 11.8-in vented disc **R:** 11.3-in disc	**F:** 11.8-in vented disc **R:** 11.3-in disc
Stability Control	partially defeatable, traction off	partially defeatable, traction off
Tires	Continental ProContact TX 245/45R-19 98H M+S TPC	Goodyear Assurance Finesse 225/55R-18 98H M+S TPC

KIA SELTOS SX TURBO AWD
Highs: Character-rich cabin, loves being chucked around, decent fuel economy.
Lows: Noisy acceleration, aging connectivity tech, never really calms down.
Verdict: Redoing your homework doesn't guarantee a better grade.

is a more playful variation in material, color, and shape in here than in the clinical gray-on-gray-on-other-gray Kona.

But the interior's age shows in small but appreciable ways. This was the only vehicle in the test that required a USB-A cable for phone mirroring. With the accelerator glued to the floor, there's a sizable four-decibel difference between the Kona and the Seltos; adopting the Kona's noise insulation would go a long way toward remedying that.

2nd PLACE: MAZDA CX-30

If our comparison-test scoring system were based on driving excitement alone, nobody else besides the Mazda would have needed to show up. Granted, the CX-30's 0.83-g skidpad result is as normcore as any other crossover's—every vehicle here landed between 0.82 and 0.85 g—but grip isn't everything. The Mazda puts together the elements of great handling. It feels taut and ready to tackle a corner; chuck that

2025 Hyundai Kona Limited AWD	2025 Kia Seltos SX Turbo AWD	2025 Mazda CX-30 Carbon Turbo AWD	2025 Subaru Crosstrek Premium	2025 Volkswagen Taos SE Black FWD
turbocharged DOHC 16-valve inline-4	turbocharged DOHC 16-valve inline-4	turbocharged DOHC 16-valve inline-4	DOHC 16-valve flat-4	turbocharged DOHC 16-valve inline-4
98 in^3 (1598 cm^3)	98 in^3 (1598 cm^3)	152 in^3 (2488 cm^3)	152 in^3 (2498 cm^3)	91 in^3 (1498 cm^3)
190 @ 6000	190 @ 6000	**250** @ 5000	182 @ 5800	174 @ 6000
195 @ 1700	195 @ 1600	**320** @ 2500	178 @ 3700	184 @ 1750
6500 rpm	6500 rpm	6250 rpm	6100 rpm	6000 rpm
18.3	17.5	**13.8**	18.4	19.0
8-speed automatic	8-speed automatic	6-speed automatic	CVT	8-speed automatic
all	all	all	all	front
3.51	3.51	3.84	3.70	3.24
F: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	**F:** struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	**F:** struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** torsion beam, coil springs	**F:** struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	**F:** struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R:** torsion beam, coil springs
F: 12.0-in vented disc **R:** 11.2-in disc	**F:** 12.0-in vented disc **R:** 11.0-in disc	**F:** 11.6-in vented disc **R:** 11.9-in disc	**F:** 12.4-in vented disc **R:** 11.2-in vented disc	**F:** 12.3-in vented disc **R:** 10.7-in disc
partially defeatable, traction off	partially defeatable, traction off	permanent	partially defeatable	partially defeatable, traction off
Kumho Majesty 9 Solus TA91 235/45R-19 99V M+S K-Silent	Kumho Majesty 9 Solus TA91 235/45R-18 94V M+S	Bridgestone Turanza EL440 215/55R-18 95H M+S	Yokohama Geolander G91 225/60R-17 99H M+S	Bridgestone Turanza LS100 215/50R-18 92H M+S

TEST RESULTS	2025 Buick Envista Avenir	2025 Chevrolet Trax Activ
Acceleration		
30 mph	2.7 sec	2.6 sec
60 mph	8.8 sec	8.5 sec
100 mph	30.6 sec	28.6 sec
1/4-Mile @ mph	16.8 sec @ 81 *Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.*	16.5 sec @ 82 *Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.*
Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	9.6 sec	9.5 sec
Top Gear, 30–50 mph	4.8 sec	4.9 sec
Top Gear, 50–70 mph	6.2 sec	6.6 sec
Top Speed	112 mph (gov ltd)	112 mph (gov ltd)
Chassis		
Braking, 70–0 mph	176 ft	175 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	**0.85 g**	0.84 g
Weight		
Curb	3141 lb	**3058 lb**
Distribution, F/R	59.9/40.1%	60.9/39.1%
Fuel		
Capacity/Octane	13.2 gal/87	13.2 gal/87
EPA Comb/City/Hwy	30/**28**/32 mpg	30/**28**/32 mpg
C/D 375-mi Trip	30 mpg	29 mpg
75-mph Hwy Driving	33 mpg	32 mpg
75-mph Hwy Range	430 mi	420 mi
Practical Stowage		
No. of 9 x 14 x 22-in Boxes, Seats Up/Folded	6/19	6/21
Length of Pipe	124.0 in	123.0 in
Largest Flat Panel, L x W	**71.1** x 41.0 in	**71.1** x 40.9 in
Sound Level		
Idle/Full Throttle	**34/71 dBA**	36/72 dBA
70-mph Cruise	**68 dBA**	69 dBA

The Kia may be older than the Hyundai, but it's also lighter and quicker. We'd say "age before beauty" was the edge it needed, but the handling scores were a tie.

sucker in, and you're met with very little body roll. Load transfers securely from side to side.

In this segment, the Mazda's turbocharged 2.5-liter inline-four is a powerhouse. On premium fuel, its 250 horsepower dwarfs the field, and the 6.2-second sprint to 60 mph takes the rest of the group to a business lunch at Gapplebee's. The six-speed automatic might not have as many ratios as some of the competition, but it works perfectly and never finds itself shuffling between gears. If you're willing to give up some power, feeding the turbo engine regular gas drops output to 227 horsepower. If you're willing to give up more power, the base 191-hp naturally aspirated four will save you thousands.

This Carbon Turbo model rings in at $35,220, a price that makes sense when you open the CX-30's door. The interior is awash in premium materials that make you wonder about Buick's definition of that term. The design, particularly the fit and finish, is a class above. And unlike Hyundai, Mazda has more than one hue in its box of cabin-color crayons.

You may be wondering why the CX-30, with so many advantages, finishes on the second step of the podium. Mazda, in its quest for fun, favored performance over practicality, a trade-off that buyers in this segment may not be willing to make. The CX-30 is small. Small enough, in fact, to carry the lowest number of boxes with the seats folded down (17, two fewer than the Buick). Managing testing editor David Beard tried to put a rear-facing child seat behind him; he's a stout five foot six and couldn't fit one securely and still sit comfortably. If you need to take four fully grown adults in comfort, call a Lyft. This one's for DINKs only.

2025 Hyundai Kona Limited AWD	**2025 Kia Seltos SX Turbo AWD**	**2025 Mazda CX-30 Carbon Turbo AWD**	**2025 Subaru Crosstrek Premium**	**2025 Volkswagen Taos SE Black FWD**
2.8 sec	2.6 sec	**2.0 sec**	3.1 sec	3.0 sec
7.6 sec	7.1 sec	**6.2 sec**	7.8 sec	8.2 sec
21.0 sec	19.8 sec	**15.7 sec**	21.5 sec	21.5 sec
15.9 sec @ 89	15.5 sec @ 91	**14.6 sec** @ **97**	16.1 sec @ 89	16.3 sec @ 88
Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.	*Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.*	*Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.*	*Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.*	*Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.*
8.2 sec	7.9 sec	**6.7 sec**	8.6 sec	8.5 sec
4.0 sec	4.0 sec	**3.2 sec**	4.5 sec	4.4 sec
5.0 sec	4.8 sec	**4.1 sec**	5.7 sec	5.6 sec
125 mph (*C/D* est)	**130 mph (mfr claim)**	126 mph (mfr claim)	**130 mph (*C/D* est)**	**130 mph (mfr claim)**
166 ft	**162 ft**	174 ft	171 ft	179 ft
0.82 g	0.83 g	0.83 g	0.82 g	0.82 g
3470 lb	3332 lb	3444 lb	3355 lb	3313 lb
59.3/40.7%	58.9/41.1%	61.0/39.0%	59.7/40.3%	59.7/40.3%
13.2 gal/87	13.2 gal/87	12.7 gal/93	**16.6 gal**/87	14.5 gal/87
26/24/29 mpg	25/24/27 mpg	25/22/30 mpg	29/27/33 mpg	**31/28/36 mpg**
24 mpg	28 mpg	28 mpg	29 mpg	**32 mpg**
35 mpg	32 mpg	–	36 mpg	**40 mpg**
460 mi	420 mi	–	**590 mi**	580 mi
7/21	7/22	7/17	7/21	**9/25**
124.0 in	121.0 in	118.0 in	120.0 in	**125.0 in**
69.2 x 41.1 in	67.0 x **41.8 in**	59.8 x 39.5 in	66.3 x 41.1 in	70.8 x 39.6 in
34/73 dBA	36/77 dBA	38/84 dBA	40/74 dBA	37/74 dBA
69 dBA	70 dBA	69 dBA	**68 dBA**	70 dBA

Tested by Austin Irwin and
Mike Sutton in Chelsea, MI

MAZDA CX-30 CARBON TURBO AWD
Highs: The handler of the group, the sprinter of the group, the best interior of the group. Lows: Barely-there back seat, light on storage space, may ride too firmly for the fam. Verdict: Prioritizes weekends over weekdays.

The Mazda is small, which means you're unlikely to see a Baby on Board sign on one, but if you want the Porsche of this segment, look no further than the CX-30.

1st PLACE: CHEVROLET TRAX

The only thing that truly stinks about the Chevrolet Trax is its straight-line hustle. At 8.5 seconds to 60 mph and 16.5 for the quarter-mile, it's on the slothy side of the speed spectrum. But that's it—well, that and a general lack of bells and whistles, but it isn't missing anything you can't live without.

We've praised the humble Trax so frequently that we're pretty much out of superlatives. Our Activ trim is one of the most expensive versions on offer, but even with two option packages tacked on, the window sticker sits firmly at an impressive

CHEVROLET TRAX ACTIV
Highs: Textbook definition of value; refined driving experience; the price is right, Bob. **Lows:** As fast as sous vide, occasional bad vibes from the little three-cylinder, trying to find a third low. **Verdict:** So much bang for your buck it'll burst an eardrum.

Final Results

VEHICLE	DRIVER COMFORT	ERGONOMICS	REAR-SEAT COMFORT	REAR-SEAT SPACE*	CARGO SPACE*	FEATURES/AMENITIES*	FIT AND FINISH	INTERIOR STYLING	EXTERIOR STYLING	REBATES/EXTRAS*	AS-TESTED PRICE*	SUBTOTAL	POWERTRAIN	1/4-MILE ACCELERATION*	FLEXIBILITY*	FUEL ECONOMY*	ENGINE NVH	TRANSMISSION	SUBTOTAL	CHASSIS	PERFORMANCE*	STEERING FEEL	BRAKE FEEL	HANDLING	RIDE	SUBTOTAL	EXPERIENCE	FUN TO DRIVE	GRAND TOTAL
Maximum points available	*10*	*10*	*5*	*5*	*5*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*5*	*20*	***100***		*20*	*5*	*10*	*10*	*10*	***55***		*20*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*10*	***60***		*25*	***240***
1. Chevrolet Trax	**8**	**9**	4	4	4	3	7	**8**	**8**	**1**	**20**	**76**		11	3	7	7	**8**	**36**		19	**8**	**8**	8	**8**	**51**		**21**	**184**
2. Mazda CX-30	**8**	6	3	4	1	5	**9**	7	7	0	15	**65**		**20**	**4**	6	7	**8**	**45**		19	**8**	6	**9**	**8**	**50**		**22**	**182**
3. Kia Seltos	7	7	**5**	**5**	**5**	7	7	7	7	0	16	**73**		16	3	6	7	**8**	**40**		**20**	6	6	6	7	**45**		**19**	**177**
4. Volkswagen Taos	7	7	4	4	**5**	6	7	7	**8**	**1**	17	**73**		12	**4**	**10**	**8**	7	**41**		19	6	7	6	7	**45**		**16**	**175**
5. Buick Envista	**8**	8	4	4	2	5	7	7	**8**	**1**	17	**71**		9	3	8	7	7	**34**		**20**	**8**	**8**	7	7	**50**		**19**	**174**
6. Hyundai Kona	7	7	**5**	**5**	4	**10**	7	7	7	**1**	15	**75**		14	**4**	2	7	7	**34**		**20**	6	6	6	7	**45**		**18**	**172**
7. Subaru Crosstrek	**8**	7	4	4	1	5	6	6	7	**1**	17	**66**		13	3	7	6	6	**35**		19	7	7	7	**8**	**48**		**16**	**165**

**These objective scores are calculated from the vehicles' dimensions, capacities, rebates and extras, and/or test results.*

$27,585. Stretching a dollar seems like a Sisyphean exercise these days, but pockets of genuine value do persist, and the Trax is one of them.

Despite the Trax's 137 horses and torsion-beam rear axle, we never had a bad time behind the wheel. It's impressive on twisty roads, helped in part by its svelte 3058-pound curb weight, the lightest of the seven. And its 32-mpg 75-mph highway fuel-economy result ties the EPA's figure.

Is the cabin richly appointed with jeweled switchgear and fragrant Connolly leather? No. But, again: twenty-seven thousand five hundred eighty-five dollars. Even among the more expensive players in the segment, the Trax's cabin is above average. There's plenty of space, the infotainment is easy to use, and, thankfully, GM has yet to eliminate phone-mirroring capability here. Ample glass means you can see out from all angles, and the hatch holds a commendable 21 boxes with the rear seats stowed, though only six with the second row erect, tied for the worst in this group.

The Chevy's biggest drawback is that it is noisier inside than its Buick sibling, and at idle, the turbo three sends more shakes and buzzes into the cabin than we like. Perhaps Buick was onto something with that additional sound deadening.

While its acceleration is lacking, the Trax handles and rides with a refined grace that belies its best-in-test price. You always feel like you're getting more than you paid for, from its interior package to its cross-your-legs rear-seat legroom. It'll chow down on rear-facing child seats and ask for seconds. Along with the Corvette, the Trax is proof that GM is capable of building the best for less.

The Trax may have the lowest price in the test, but don't ever call it cheap—that would indicate low value. Rear-seat legroom is vast.

A DIGEST OF TESTS, UNFETTERED OPINIONS, AND SOME INTERESTING MINUTIAE

Drivelines

AMG's swole coupe squats on its 21-inch wheels. A wide, toothy grille gives the GT63 the piscine countenance of a very large and sporty grouper.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL SIMARI

Heavy Mover

Mercedes-AMG GT63 S E Performance

HIGHS: Devilishly handsome, neck-straining athleticism, meaningful electric assistance.

LOWS: A prime candidate for Ozempic, wonky brake feel, shrunken cargo hold.

NOT ONE TO SHY AWAY from controversy in its quest for speed, Mercedes-AMG boldly changed course with its latest-generation GT coupe. While its predecessor was a lean rear-wheel-drive hunter of Porsche's sportiest 911s, the current model has grown larger, become more sophisticated, and (gasp) adopted all-wheel drive. It's even sprouted a pair of optional rear jump seats. The addition of a plug-in hybrid GT63 S E Performance model certainly won't stifle critics of evolutionary bloat. But the result is the brand's quickest and most powerful two-door this side of the Formula 1–engined AMG One.

Included in its $16,850 upcharge over the $180,200 GT63 coupe, the hybrid S version's rear-mounted E Performance module adds a 201-hp AC motor mated to a two-speed transmission, plus a 5-kWh battery pack. This can power the car on its own for short distances (six miles in our 75-mph highway test) via the car's variable all-wheel-drive system. But the prime mover is a front-mounted twin-turbo 4.0-liter V-8 lashed to a nine-speed automatic with a multiplate clutch pack, no torque converter here. The engine's 603 horsepower and 627 pound-feet of torque sit between the regular GT63 coupe's 577-hp tune and the four-door GT63 S E Performance model's 630-hp output. Factor in the e-motor's contribution, and AMG's convoluted arithmetic gives you a total output of 805 horsepower and 1047 pound-feet.

There's no finessing our test car's corpulent 4743-pound curb weight, 498 pounds more than the nonhybrid GT63 and over half a ton up on the previous GT R model. Engage the hybrid's launch control, however, and it muscles to 60 mph in a scant 2.4 seconds, beating the nonhybrid version by 0.3 second. Keep on it, and amid the 91-decibel thunder of the V-8, you can feel the car catch a second wind around 75 mph as the rear electric motor finds high gear. You get a 10-second shot of full boost, and then power peters out to a steady 94 horses just before the E Performance trips the quarter-mile lights in a heady 10.4 seconds at 135 mph, at which point the standard GT63 is 0.5 second and 10 mph behind. That pace will also win a drag race against humbler hybrids such as the all-wheel-drive, 655-hp Chevrolet Corvette E-Ray and the rear-wheel-drive, 532-hp Porsche 911 GTS. Just know that the margin of victory will only be by about a bumper's thickness (0.2 second).

Despite the hybrid's active roll control and rear-axle steering, that extra weight contributes to its slightly reduced skidpad grip, 1.04 g's to the nonhybrid's 1.06 g's. Another factor: 52.1 percent of the GT63 S E's bulk sits on its tail versus only 45.8 percent for the regular car. This rear-weight bias results in a pendulum effect that can manifest in lift-throttle oversteer, particularly when you attempt to channel its full thrust through the rear tires in Drift mode. Though a dollop of countersteer from the GT63 E's ultraquick steering will catch a wayward slide, its brake-pedal feel is inconsistent as it juggles regeneration requirements. Still, our test car's standard carbon-ceramic stoppers hauled it down from 70 mph in 147 feet and from 100 mph in 287 feet, beating the lighter GT63 coupe by six and 12 feet. That's with the two sporting the same brakes and optional 21-inch Michelin Pilot Sport S5 summer tires (20-inchers are standard).

In the wild, the adaptive dampers help maintain enough ride compliance to traverse Michigan's shoddy pavement without making us wince too much. The hybrid system does shrink the luggage hold from 11 cubic feet to just seven cubes, but its integration with the gas engine is almost seamless in regular driving. Cruising around town in the near silence of Electric mode is a rejuvenating trick after enduring the 74-decibel din we recorded inside at 70 mph. But of the multitudinous drive settings, we found it most helpful to toggle in and out of Race mode, as it runs the gas engine harder in order to replenish the battery in just a few miles. Alternately, plug in, and AMG says the 3.7-kW onboard charger will fill the pack from 25 to 100 percent in two hours. Hybridization also ups the GT63 coupe's EPA combined estimate from 14 to 19 mpg.

All ate up with twin-turbocharged V-8 engine. The motor doesn't live under the hood; it's in the back. Together this dynamic duo produces 805 horsepower.

The AMG GT interior shares much with this car's droptop counterpart, the Mercedes-AMG SL. Two seats are standard, but adding rear seats is a no-cost option.

As a head-turning power play with some electric range, the GT63 S E Performance highlights the GT coupe's newfound duality as a serious sports car that can moonlight as a high-tech grand tourer. This powertrain setup is arguably more compelling in the GT63 S E's more practical four-door variant, which is just as quick to 60 mph. And the two-door GT63 Pro trim makes a stronger case as the driver's choice of the bunch, packing the 603-hp V-8 from the hybrid yet forgoing the weight and complexity of electric assistance. But for those seeking the ultimate AMG GT coupe, the GT63 S E is the one to get. *—Mike Sutton*

The hybrid system enables a few miles of engine-off city driving should you tire of the V-8's fortissimo sound.

2025 MERCEDES-AMG GT63 S E PERFORMANCE

Vehicle Type: front-engine, rear-motor, rear/all-wheel-drive, 2+2-passenger, 2-door coupe **Base/As Tested:** $197,050/$218,850 **Engine:** twin-turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 32-valve 4.0-liter V-8, 603 hp, 627 lb-ft **Motor:** AC, 201 hp, 236 lb-ft **Combined Output:** 805 hp, 1047 lb-ft **Transmissions, F/R:** 9-speed automatic/2-speed automatic **Battery Pack:** liquid-cooled lithium-ion, 5 kWh **Peak Charge Rate:** 3.7 kW **Wheelbase:** 106.3 in **L/W/H:** 186.1/78.1/53.3 in ***C/D* Curb Weight:** 4743 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	2.4 sec
100 mph	5.8 sec
130 mph	9.5 sec
1/4-Mile	10.4 sec @ 135 mph
150 mph	12.4 sec
170 mph	18.3 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	3.1 sec
Top Speed (mfr claim)	199 mph
Braking, 70–0/100–0 mph	147/287 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	1.04 g

***C/D* FUEL ECONOMY AND RANGE**

Observed	14 MPGe
75-mph Hwy Driving, EV/Hybrid	58 MPGe/26 mpg
75-mph Hwy Range, EV/Hybrid	6/480 mi

EPA FUEL ECONOMY

Combined/EV Range	28 MPGe/1 mi

The Strong, Silent Type

Cadillac Lyriq-V **HIGHS:** Blackwing-beating acceleration, uprated chassis, Cadillac-grade ride comfort. **LOWS:** Too hushed, minor range reduction, the V doesn't stand for value.

YES, THE 2026 LYRIQ-V is the quickest Cadillac ever, hitting 60 mph in 3.3 seconds. That beats even the 668-hp CT5-V Blackwing. When laying down those sprints to 60, there are no smoky burnouts—only a muted whoosh and whine that you might not pick up over ambient traffic noise.

But the Lyriq-V is perhaps a little too quiet at the moment; Cadillac is still developing its voice. In addition to in-cabin sound supplementation, the Lyriq-V's external speakers will generate a performance-based sound in V-mode. The feature wasn't finalized when we drove the SUV, but details will be available later this year.

Annoyingly, accessing the full 615-hp and 650-lb-ft output requires selecting Velocity Max mode; otherwise you get the power of less expensive Lyriqs. Switching into Competitive mode, accessed via the V-mode button on the steering

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL SIMARI

A black roof, body-color wheel openings and lower trim, available carbon-fiber accents, and special 22-inch wheels are V-series giveaways.

wheel, also unlocks full power and uses the individual motors and the stability-control system to maximize traction from corner entry to corner exit. Bottom line: Keep your right foot buried, and the car will rotate like a thread-stripped bolt.

In standard mode, the V makes the same 515 horsepower and 450 pound-feet of torque as other dual-motor Lyriqs. But even then, acceleration is quicker off the line because Cadillac dug into GM's history books for an old muscle-car trick: a shorter final-drive ratio at both axles.

A quicker steering rack and a retuned suspension yield additional dynamic dividends. Sachs adaptive dampers enhance body control. Cadillac also stiffened the springs, mounts, anti-roll bars—pretty much every major suspension-related bit.

The brakes are more capable too. The Lyriq-V gets unique six-piston Brembo calipers and larger rotors up front. Optional rotors and brake pads trade off a little noise for improved performance and heat resistance, Cadillac claims. Stops from 70 mph take 158 feet, 24 feet less than the standard all-wheel-drive Lyriq, but resulted in clouds of brake smoke, a side effect of bringing 6062 pounds to a halt in 2.9 seconds. Continental PremiumContact 6 summer performance tires (275/40R-22 front and rear) come standard, although Michelin all-season rubber is available. The Continentals yielded 0.87 g of lateral grip.

More proactive battery cooling keeps the Lyriq-V ready to deliver max power and torque longer. The upgraded cooling, higher output, and improved acceleration don't have much of a negative effect on range. We saw 260 miles in our 75-mph highway range test, just 10 miles less than what we got on a rear-wheel-drive 2023 Lyriq.

The Lyriq-V starts at $80,090, about $16K more than an entry-level all-wheel-drive Lyriq. The V is a more exciting version of the model it's based on. It just doesn't shout about it. *—Bengt Halvorson*

2026 CADILLAC LYRIQ-V PREMIUM

Vehicle Type: front- and rear-motor, all-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door wagon **Base/As Tested:** $80,090/ $87,110 **Motors:** 2 permanent-magnet synchronous AC **Combined Output:** 615 hp, 650 lb-ft **Transmissions, F/R:** direct-drive **Battery Pack:** liquid-cooled lithium-ion, 102 kWh **Peak Charge Rate, AC/DC:** 19.2/190 kW **Wheelbase:** 121.8 in **L/W/H:** 197.0/77.8/64.1 in ***C/D* Curb Weight:** 6062 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	3.3 sec
100 mph	8.8 sec
1/4-Mile	11.9 sec @ 114 mph
130 mph	16.9 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.2 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	3.5 sec
Top Speed (gov ltd)	131 mph
Braking, 70–0/100–0 mph	158/385 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	0.87 g

C/D FUEL ECONOMY AND RANGE

Observed	59 MPGe
75-mph Hwy Range	260 mi
Average DC Fast-Charge Rate, 10–90%	103 kW
DC Fast-Charge Time, 10–90%	57 min

EPA FUEL ECONOMY

Combined/Range	80 MPGe/285 mi

Seeing Signs

Ram 2500 **HIGHS:** More muscle and hustle, smooth-shifting transmission, impressive fuel economy. **LOWS:** Diesel option alone costs roughly 68 percent of a new Nissan Versa, steering and brake feel need to enter the modern era.

THERE'S A ROAD SIGN on the edge of town that reads No Engine Brake. Though we're pretty sure that only applies to semi trucks, as we approach the zone in the diesel-powered Ram 2500 with a trailer in tow and the engine brake fully engaged, the big diesel works against the load, emitting a throaty purr that gives off 18-wheeler vibes. Maybe that sign was meant for us after all.

The inline-six Cummins has always been the best-sounding diesel engine in the heavy-duty segment. For '25, the big 6.7-liter has been further refined and given more power. But not enough to top Ford's optional Power Stroke High Output, with its burly 500 horsepower and 1200 pound-feet of torque. The Ram's revised turbocharged Cummins features a new intake, larger-diameter valves (24 of them), a quicker-spooling turbo, and increased fuel pressure. The result is a 60-hp gain to 430 horses, plus 225 more pound-feet of torque for 1075 total—the most of any base diesel in the class. Just bring an additional $12,595 to the table.

The extra power is fantastic, and so are more forward gears. The old six-speed automatic, with its huge step from first to second gear, is now history. Instead, there's a smooth-shifting ZF-sourced eight-speed, which can start off in second when an empty load doesn't require first.

Naturally, more muscle brings more hustle. Our 8480-pound, nearly 22-foot-long conglomeration of steel, leather, and touchscreens stormed to 60 mph in 6.3 seconds and clipped the quarter-mile in 14.8 seconds at 92 mph. The new powertrain is also more fuel efficient. Its 22-mpg result in our 75-mph test is a 4-mpg improvement and translates to 700 miles between fill-ups.

While the powertrain is a home run, the steering could use some refinement. The response flatlines off-center; blame the recirculating balls between your hands and the road. But the Ram hangs on for 0.71 g around the skidpad, a decent performance for its massive wheelbase.

With a max tow rating of 18,230 pounds, the 2500 Limited Crew Cab four-by-four deserves a firm and reassuring brake pedal. Ours, however, turned to mashed potatoes during panic stops from 70 mph, requiring us to move the seat forward so our foot could kiss the firewall. Still, 212 feet in that test is a competitive result. As for another sign we saw, Brake Check Area—yeah, that one was definitely for us. —*David Beard*

Climb aboard, big-truck drivers, and be greeted by a towering 14.5-inch touchscreen and an old-school column shifter.

2025 RAM 2500 LIMITED CREW CAB 4x4

Vehicle Type: front-engine, rear/4-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door pickup **Base/As Tested:** $78,390/$99,570 **Engine:** turbocharged and intercooled pushrod 24-valve diesel inline-6, iron block and head, direct fuel injection **Displacement:** 408 in^3, 6690 cm^3 **Power:** 430 hp @ 2800 rpm **Torque:** 1075 lb-ft @ 1800 rpm **Transmission:** 8-speed automatic **Wheelbase:** 169.0 in **L/W/H:** 260.9/83.5/80.1 in ***C/D* Curb Weight:** 8480 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	6.3 sec
1/4-Mile	14.8 sec @ 92 mph
100 mph	17.8 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	8.0 sec
Top Speed (gov ltd)	102 mph
Braking, 70–0 mph	212 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	0.71 g

FUEL ECONOMY

***C/D* Observed**	15 mpg
75-mph Hwy Fuel Economy/Range	22 mpg/700 mi

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL SIMARI

So Long, Farewell

Tesla Cybertruck Long Range **HIGHS:** Kids think it's *Minecraft* for real life, plenty roomy under that pointy roof, not bad at driving itself. **LOWS:** Much slower, reduced capability, you can't buy one.

WELL, THIS IS AWKWARD (and we're not referring to the Tesla Cybertruck's looks, steering, debut, or driver interface). Tesla finally came through on its promise of a less expensive, rear-drive Cybertruck, then yanked it out of the lineup.

Tesla planned the sub-$75K version from the start, but it didn't debut until over a year into Cybertruck production. With no front motor, the rear-wheel-drive Long Range makes 321 horsepower, versus the dual-motor's 593 horses and the tri-motor Beast's 834. Maximum towing capacity is reduced from 11,000 to 7500 pounds. The Long Range reaches 60 mph in 6.1 seconds, against 3.9 seconds for the dual-motor and 2.6 for the Beast. That makes it the slowest Tesla we've ever tested.

That slowness is actually a boon for drivability, given the attention required to adjust to the Cybertruck's unusual steering. It's darty at low speeds, thanks to the active-steering rack's quick action (with 0.9 turn lock to lock) and assistance from rear-wheel steering. You can select the optional Full Self-Driving mode ($8000) and surrender the controls. It's eerie, but it works impressively well.

Coil springs and adaptive dampers replace air springs here, and they do a commendable job, but the ride height is no longer adjustable. The headlights are a simpler design. Ventilated front seats, the rear passenger's display, and in-bed power outlets are missing.

A Cybertruck isn't really a vehicle so much as a vibe. And it turns out that a less powerful, less expensive variant doesn't jibe with that vibe.

2025 TESLA CYBERTRUCK LONG RANGE
Vehicle Type: rear-motor, rear-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door pickup **Base/As Tested:** $72,235/$83,735
Motor: permanent-magnet synchronous AC **Power:** 321 hp
Torque: 331 lb-ft **Transmission:** direct-drive **Battery Pack:** liquid-cooled lithium-ion, 123 kWh **Peak Charge Rate, AC/DC:** 11.5/325 kW **Wheelbase:** 143.1 in **L/W/H:** 223.7/80.0/70.1 in ***C/D* Curb Weight:** 6172 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	6.1 sec
1/4-Mile	14.8 sec @ 93 mph
100 mph	17.9 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	6.2 sec
Top Speed (gov ltd)	114 mph
Braking, 70–0 mph	179 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	0.76 g

***C/D* FUEL ECONOMY AND RANGE**

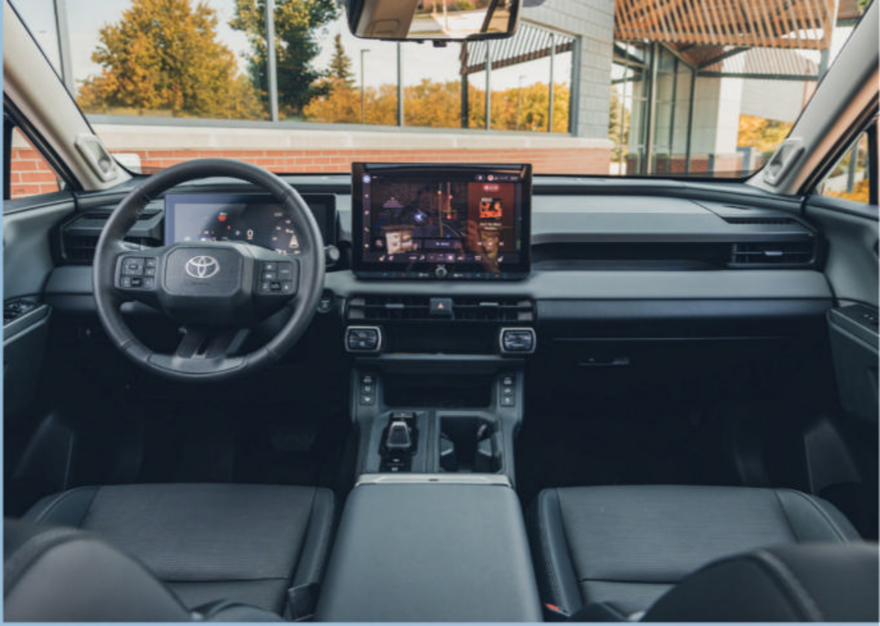
Observed	55 MPGe
75-mph Hwy Range	250 mi

EPA FUEL ECONOMY

Combined/Range	78 MPGe/335 mi

This iteration does live up to its Long Range name, returning 250 miles on our 75-mph highway loop. And had it been wearing the stock 18-inch wheels instead of optional 20s, its range likely would have been slightly longer still. The lack of a motorized tonneau cover over the cargo bed hurts efficiency (we found that the cover provided a roughly 11 percent range improvement in the Beast). Tesla offered a hand-drawn curtain for this lesser model, but it wasn't fitted to this truck. The upside is that it doesn't obstruct the view in what must be the world's smallest rearview mirror. The forward view, though, is still compromised by the fat, far-reaching A-pillars.

The rear-drive Cybertruck was a slow seller for Tesla. Too slow, evidently. Just days after one arrived at our office, the Cybertruck Long Range dropped off the automaker's online configurator. It was available for only about five months. At least in that respect, it was quick. —*David Gluckman*



Fully Hybrid Workspace

Toyota RAV4 **HIGHS:** Responsive and linear acceleration, easy-to-use touchscreen, lots of convenient features. **LOWS:** Noisy engine, unimpressive interior materials, seems dull by design.

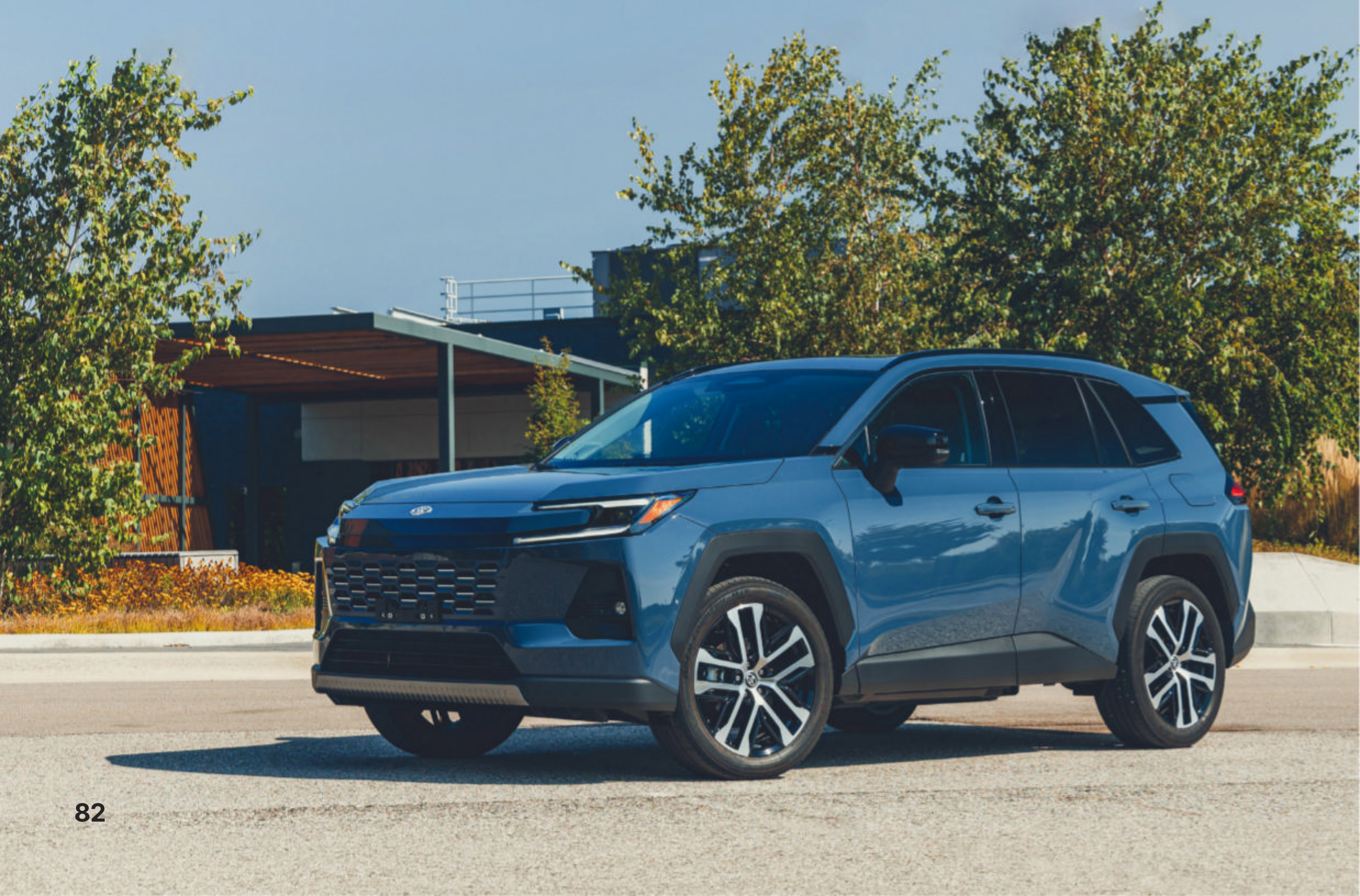
IF COCA-COLA STARTED selling only Diet Coke, there would be an uproar. But we haven't noticed any such response to Toyota's decision to offer several of its core models, the latest being the bestselling RAV4, exclusively as hybrids. Some people prefer Diet anyway, and Toyota has been working for years to get people used to the flavor of its gas-electric powertrains.

In the outgoing RAV4, the hybrid and plug-in hybrid (PHEV) models were quicker, quieter, and more fuel efficient than their gas siblings. In 2024, about half of the 475,193 RAV4s sold were hybrids.

The redesigned model's handsome, upright profile gives it a tougher appearance. Many styles are on offer, including an especially rugged-looking Woodland and a racy GR Sport for the PHEV that even adds a rear spoiler. The platform underneath is mostly carryover, though, aside from increased rigidity and a few suspension tweaks.

The front-wheel-drive RAV4 now makes 226 horsepower, and the PHEV is good for up to 320. The all-wheel-drive RAV4 Limited we tested, now with 236 horsepower, reached 60 mph in 7.1 seconds, two-tenths quicker than before. While the

The blocky interior design takes inspiration from the Toyota 4Runner, while the trapezoidal wheel openings ape the Sequoia's.



Although the hybrid RAV4 is quicker than before, the 320-hp plug-in version remains the choice for speedy getaways.

2.5-liter engine is unchanged, the hybrid transaxle and its two electric motors are new. Transitions between gas and electric power are smoother.

The four-cylinder is loud and buzzy under hard acceleration, though, with some vibration coming through the steering wheel and accelerator. We recorded 75 decibels at wide-open throttle, three decibels louder than in the Honda CR-V Hybrid. The RAV4's steering is pleasingly weighted and accurate, but the high seating position and notable body roll don't inspire hard cornering.

The cabin design reminds us of other Toyota SUVs, with a liberal use of hard plastic. Hey, Toyota, how about a little more padding on the center-console armrest? This Limited's 12.9-inch touchscreen is big and responsive, and a toggle shifter lends a modern touch. But even the top trim suffers from cheap-looking plastics on the dash and door panels.

Rear-seat room and cargo space are crucial elements for any SUV, and the RAV4 offers plenty of both. Our test vehicle also came with a long list of connectivity features and driver assists.

The new RAV4 betters its predecessor on paper and makes a convincing case for hybrids. But this generation hasn't taken a big-enough step forward to catch up to our favorites in the segment. *—Joey Capparella*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL SIMARI

2026 TOYOTA RAV4 LIMITED AWD

Vehicle Type: front-engine, front- and rear-motor, all-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door wagon **Base/As Tested (*C/D* est):** $44,000/$46,000 **Engine:** DOHC 16-valve Atkinson-cycle 2.5-liter inline-4, 176 hp, 163 lb-ft **Motors:** 3 AC **Combined Output:** 236 hp **Transmissions, F/R:** continuously variable automatic with 1 fixed ratio/direct-drive **Battery Pack:** air-cooled lithium-ion **Wheelbase:** 105.9 in **L/W/H:** 180.9/73.0/67.0 in ***C/D* Curb Weight:** 3875 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	7.1 sec
1/4-Mile	15.3 sec @ 92 mph
100 mph	18.5 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	7.6 sec
Top Speed (gov ltd)	112 mph
Braking, 70–0 mph	179 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	0.80 g

FUEL ECONOMY

***C/D* Observed**	34 mpg
75-mph Hwy Fuel Economy/Range	36 mpg/520 mi
EPA Combined (*C/D* est)	43 mpg

Power Struggle

Acura ADX **HIGHS:** Looks nothing like its Honda relation, handsomely finished interior, well-tuned chassis. **LOWS:** Synthetic engine note, sluggish acceleration, uncomfortable rear seat.

SMALL SUVS ARE REPLACING small cars as the entry point for automotive brands, and the change extends beyond their shape. At Acura, the Integra, priced from $34,195, is now joined by the ADX, a new small SUV that starts at $36,350.

Whereas the Integra evolved from the Honda Civic, the ADX is closer kin to the HR-V. It rides on the same 104.5-inch wheelbase but shares none of the Honda's body panels. A 190-hp turbocharged 1.5-liter four-cylinder works with a CVT. Output is down 10 horses to the base Integra, but the turbo four easily shades the HR-V's 158-hp 2.0-liter.

Still, the baby SUVs from Audi, BMW, Lexus, and Volvo have more power. So while our all-wheel-drive A-Spec Advance's 8.7-second 60-mph time may better the HR-V's glacial 9.4, it's well behind those premium-brand rivals, which all get the job done at least a second quicker. The quickest in the segment, the Mini Countryman JCW, needs only 4.6 seconds to hit 60 mph.

The ADX's 179 pound-feet of torque is available at a low 1700 rpm, so calls for acceleration don't always send the tach needle soaring. But when the 1.5-liter is giving its all, the ADX's climb up to speed is accompanied by the nasal honk of a synthetic engine note. And the soundtrack is a vocal 78 decibels under wide-open throttle. That's significantly louder than in the Volvo XC40 or the Lexus NX350.

The all-wheel-drive ADX's gas mileage is more in line with segment norms, rated at 25 mpg city and 30 mpg highway (26/31 mpg with front-wheel drive). Yet here again, it can't match the Integra.

The ADX corners eagerly, guided by quick steering with spot-on weighting. This car also erases bumps and traverses bad pavement with minimal fuss. It's not a funster in the manner of the canyon-slaying Integra Type S—note the modest 0.82 g of skidpad grip—but the ADX's ride and secure handling should please its audience.

Inside, there's a strong Acura-family resemblance, with nice materials, plentiful storage, and gimmick-free controls. The touchscreen isn't the biggest out there, but you get wireless smartphone mirroring. Seating comfort is fine up front, but the back suffers from low seat cushions.

The SUV form gives the ADX more interior room than the Integra, and all-wheel drive isn't available on the Integra. But there are clear performance and fuel-economy trade-offs. We're glad that—for now—the ADX isn't the only choice at the affordable end of the Acura spectrum. *—Joe Lorio*

2025 ACURA ADX AWD A-SPEC ADVANCE

Vehicle Type: front-engine, all-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door wagon **Base/As Tested:** $38,350/$45,950 **Engine:** turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 16-valve inline-4, aluminum block and head, direct fuel injection **Displacement:** 91 in^3, 1498 cm^3 **Power:** 190 hp @ 6000 rpm **Torque:** 179 lb-ft @ 1700 rpm **Transmission:** continuously variable automatic **Wheelbase:** 104.5 in **L/W/H:** 185.8/72.5/63.8 in ***C/D* Curb Weight:** 3601 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	8.7 sec
1/4-Mile	16.9 sec @ 86 mph
100 mph	24.0 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.4 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	9.3 sec
Top Speed (*C/D* est)	125 mph
Braking, 70–0 mph	176 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	0.82 g

FUEL ECONOMY

***C/D* Observed**	23 mpg
75-mph Hwy Fuel Economy/Range	29 mpg/400 mi
EPA Combined	27 mpg

It looks like an Acura inside, and that's a good thing. The touchscreen is on the small side, though.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDI HEDRICK

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Fleeting Thoughts

Updates and hot takes on the vehicles fortunate enough to spend 40,000 miles with *C/D*'s editors.

2025 Subaru Forester Sport

MILES: 2187
OBSERVED MPG: 24

There's no doubt about it: New cars are expensive. With the average new-car price hovering just under $50,000, we thought now was a good time to welcome something a little more down-to-earth. So, we've added a Subaru Forester Sport to our long-term test fleet. In contrast to the caviar-budget pricing that many of our test cars carry, our Forester stickers for an easier-to-swallow $37,730.

The 2025 model year marks the start of the Forester's sixth generation. It might look a lot like the last Forester, but every bit of the exterior is new. Our test example's color combination helps it stand out, with a motif of blue paint and bronze wheels that do their best impersonation of the hallowed WRX.

Subaru's familiar 2.5-liter flat-four returns as the only available engine but with improved responsiveness. Horsepower is marginally lower, dropping from 182 to 180. Peak torque, on the other hand, improves by two pound-feet, rising from 176 to 178. These tweaks might not seem like much, but it's not just about power—it's about where the oomph shows up. Peak torque now arrives at 3700 rpm, considerably earlier than the outgoing Forester's lofty 4400 rpm.

While we were optimistic that the updates would result in a bit more around-town zip, our initial evaluation suggests we need to temper our expectations. At our test track, the Forester Sport required 8.4 seconds to reach 60 mph, ranking it among the slowest models in the segment.

We've historically regarded the Forester as having a poised demeanor and accurate steering. The sixth generation comes with a variant of the WRX's electrically assisted steering rack that breathes far less life into the helm than the setup's pedigree suggests.

Nevertheless, our brains are swimming with ideas for putting Subaru's new tool to use. Whether that's transporting canoes, tackling Michigan's off-road trails, or simply making school pickups and grocery runs, we will be sure to keep our Forester plenty busy. And we'll provide all the details on how this accessibly priced Subie manages it all. —*Jack Fitzgerald*

RIVERSIDE
CANOE TRIPS
BEER & WINE
BOATS
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2024 BMW i4 xDrive40 Gran Coupe

MILES: 28,850
OBSERVED MPGe: 84

Relationships evolve, including those with our cars. We still love the BMW i4 with the Purple People Eater paint job for the things that made it a 2023 10Best winner: sweetly communicative steering, an uncannily absorbent ride, crisp handling, and the way its potent 396-hp dual-motor electric powertrain delivers effortless rushes of speed. It's those character traits that remind us of the best BMW sports sedans of the past.

Beyond affection, the months and miles since this BMW arrived in November 2023 have also bred acceptance for its idiosyncrasies and mysterious—and expensive—foibles. Such as the M Sport package's Hankook Ventus S1 Evo3 summer tires, which took a beating during our standard skidpad test (we replaced them with a $1409 set of Michelin Pilot Sport 4 summer tires). When winter arrived, the Michelin X-Ice Snow rubber ($1211) we fitted resulted in dry-road handling marked by unnerving wobbliness. A set of BMW-spec Goodyear Ultra Grip winters ($1335, available exclusively at BMW dealers) restored the i4's glued-to-the-tarmac feel.

What can't be remedied is a paucity of rear-seat room for adults, which also makes rear-facing child seats a tight fit. At least the i4 makes the most of its 84-kWh battery, with road-tripping editors reporting good energy efficiency—at times more than three miles per kilowatt-hour. Our 84 MPGe (versus an EPA-estimated 99 MPGe) isn't bad either—though in cold weather, range has dropped at a faster rate, causing some anxiety. No surprise there. By now, we love and understand the i4 like an old friend, personality quirks and all. Like we said, acceptance. —*Rich Ceppos*

2024 Kia EV9 Land AWD

MILES: 32,992

OBSERVED MPGe: 71

While we're unapologetic evangelists for minivans, those wanting an electric one have a single option: the Volkswagen ID.Buzz. Kia's three-row EV9, however, with its studio-sized cabin and easily accessible third row, is just a sliding door short of van status. Mix in our all-wheel-drive example's quartet of reclining seats and abundant cubby storage—enough for an entire kindergarten class—and the EV9 has been a popular road-trip vehicle among our staff.

That's despite an EPA-estimated range of 280 miles, plus the angst and stress associated with accessing public fast-chargers on long trips. Thankfully, if you do find a 350-kW station, the EV9 juices up with impressive quickness, needing less than 40 minutes to charge from 10 to 90 percent. Our 379-hp Land trim is plenty quick too, its 5.1-second 60-mph time ensuring it'll outrace most family shuttles in the neighborhood.

Still, it hasn't been all good in the 'hood as we approach the 40,000-mile mark. Our EV9 has suffered some build-quality issues, notably an incessantly squeaky center-console lid, which was eventually fixed under warranty. And should you fill all the seats (six in our tester, seven in some other versions), you may need to restrict the amount of stuff everyone can bring. Only five carry-on suitcases fit behind the third row, and the tiny frunk can't hold much more than a couple of laptops. But fold all the seats down, and the interior becomes one roomy cargo box. Surprisingly, we haven't had any issues with the Ocean Blue Matte paint, which requires touchless carwashes. Less surprising is our overall fondness for the EV9. *—Eric Stafford*

What's in the box? Another box, and a big one at that. Carrying a bike is one way to combat range anxiety, and in this instance we didn't need to remove it to charge.

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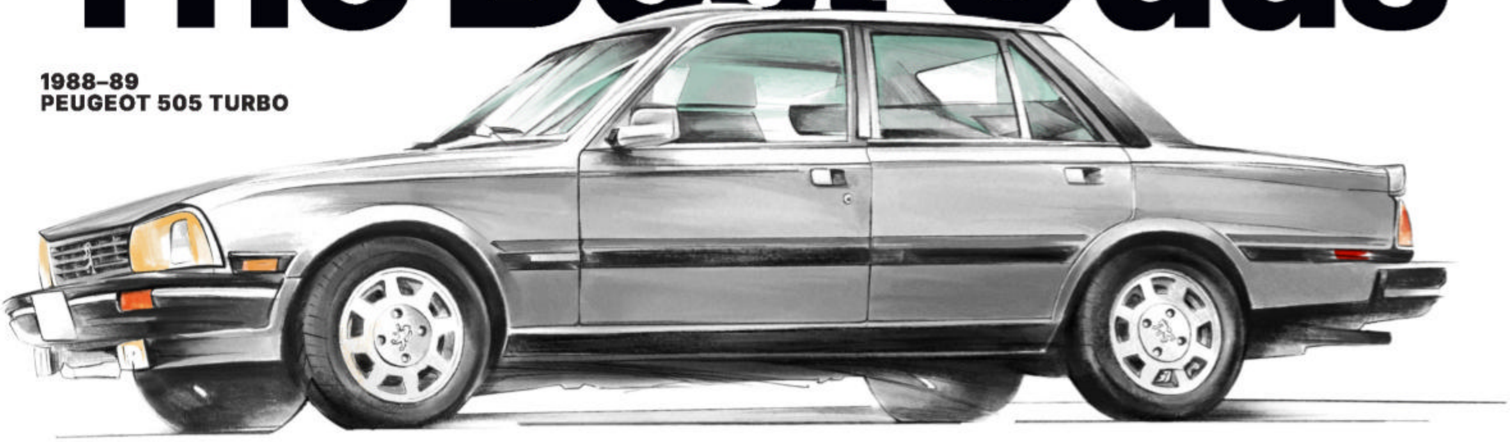
The Best Odds



1988–89
PEUGEOT 505 TURBO

The cars I recall most fondly were neither the prettiest nor the quickest. Certainly not the most expensive. They were machines that emerged willfully peculiar and intractably idiosyncratic. by John Phillips

THE 1988 AND ’89 Peugeot 505 Turbos were buttercream macarons from France. As gifts go, the Peugeot was not exactly the Statue of Liberty, but likewise a metallic Gallic chef d’oeuvre prone to oxidation. The 505 was my personal French connection, even though its styling seemed conjured by H&R Block. In truth, it was good ol’ Pininfarina that came up with what resembles a large rectangle carrying a smaller rectangle on its back. One of those rectangles has slightly crossed eyes. The stylists must have labored for minutes.

But forget that, because the rear-drive 505 Turbos were eldritch gems that reliably entertained. Power derived from a 2.2-liter four, itself mildly weird, making 180 horsepower. That’s beans on toast by today’s standards, but this comfortable sedan was comparatively slim at 3183 pounds. Pushed hard, the 505 Turbo was as fun as a BMW 325i. It also evinced a unique smell.

The Turbo came with anti-lock brakes, alloy wheels, A/C, power door locks, heated seats, cruise, a sunroof, a 12-speaker stereo, fog lamps, and an air dam. Everything except a cellophane-wrapped 1921 Bordeaux. The ’89 model was treated to a slapdash styling comb-over with a decklid spoiler and a Torsen limited-slip differential. Starting at $26,335, the Turbo was a diamond priced like cubic zirconia. Palpable value.

All 505s boasted grippy seats upholstered in velour. It helped at the track, where the car demonstrated aggressive turn-in, then understeer that you could neutralize with trail braking. Heading home, you whispered Frostian verse to the shifter and the long suspension travel. The 505’s ride was the best since, well, any other French car’s. “So refined and luxurious and generally enjoyable over long hauls,” noted David E. Davis Jr., “that I’ve come to think of it as the poor man’s Jaguar XJ6.” Davis was many things; poor was not one of them. He’d already owned a Jag.

I’m not sure how my affection for French cars blossomed. Well, I drove Davis’s ’37 Citroën Traction Avant to my wedding. I nearly persuaded my father to buy a 505, which could have been the first French anything to brighten Columbus, Ohio. Then he obsessed over a grotty Renault Alpine A110 that he’d somehow exhumed near Cherbourg. I arranged an intervention.

The principal knock against the 505 Turbo, aside from a low-octane knock and a sunroof that whistled like a five-franc flute, was turbo lag. The Peugeot’s narcoleptic turbo could enrage as you awaited a break in traffic: “Come on, come on.” It was like turning on a garden sprinkler attached to a 100-foot hose. Impatience leads you to stare at the delivery end, and then the water explodes in your face, and you are starring in a Parisian episode of *Jackass.*

Nowadays, lightly used 505s are rare. They’re often in the range of seven to eight dollars. Slap down a tenner, and you earn an Édith Piaf autograph.

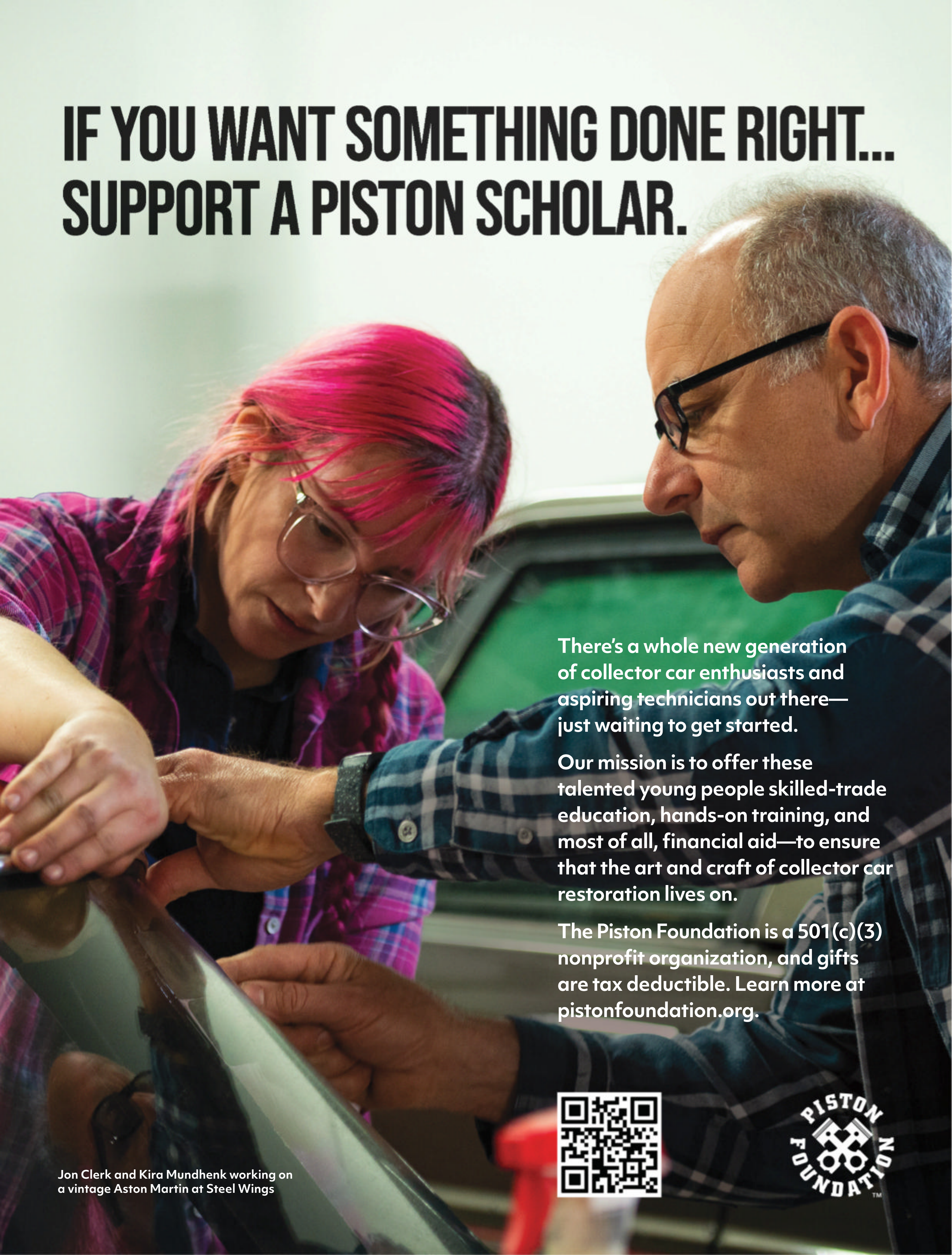
While composing these essays, what I’ve grasped is that I value differences, oddities, clashing colors, incongruous styling, and mouse fur. If the window switches are on the headliner, who cares? If the interior smells like prints developing at Eastman Kodak, I’ll bathe in the fixer. If a Chrysler K-car receives a Maserati engine, well, hang on, that’s just bugger-all insane, although the Citroën SM was thus fitted and is today collectible (well, for those who possess a doctorate in green-goop hydraulics).

Any car that evokes the phrase “Why’d they do that?” is to me worth its weight in Roquefort, despite the baby-blue boogers the French insert so enthusiastically. Which, I’ve been reliably assured, come from Napoleon’s nose.

Does anyone remember the semi-charming Peugeot 405 Mi16? I attended its U.S. debut in Colorado, where Peugeot’s PR manager, Daniel Petit, announced: “You’re gonna laugh when you hear what happened. All the 405s are still on the boat.” The room filled with groans at a volume possibly audible in Sochaux. “Instead of the 405,” Daniel said, “we’ve arranged a 505 Turbo for each of you to drive home.” Complaints dwindled.

I parked that rubicund Peugeot in my garage, hoping Daniel’s memory was akin to an average American’s. When he asked for its return, I was at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Unfortunately, so was Daniel.

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEXIS MARCOU



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